

THIS MORTAL COIL

tenth annual thematic option research conference

April 10-11, 2007

The world . . . is corporeal, that is to say, body, and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body, is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body, is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it, is nothing; and consequently no where.

- Thomas Hobbes

Man consists of two parts, his mind and his body, only the body has more fun.

- Woody Allen

The stories in “The Thousand and One Nights” . . . are stories about storytelling without ever ceasing to be stories about love and life and death and money and food and other human necessities. Narration is as much a part of human nature as breath and the circulation of the blood. Modernist literature tried to do away with storytelling, which it thought vulgar, replacing it with flashbacks, epiphanies, streams of consciousness. But storytelling is intrinsic to biological time, which we cannot escape. Life, Pascal said, is like living in a prison from which every day fellow prisoners are taken away to be executed. We are all, like Scheherazade, under sentence of death, and we all think of our lives as narratives, with beginnings, middles, and ends.

- A. Byatt

To be human is to be in the tense condition of a death-foreseeing, consciously libidinous animal. No other earthly creature suffers such a capacity for thought, such a complexity of envisioned but frustrated possibilities, such a troubling ability to question the tribal and biological imperatives.

- John Updike

Ultimately what draws us to a work of art is not just the sensory experience of the medium but its emotional content and insight into the human condition. And these tap into the timeless tragedies of our biological predicament: our mortality, our finite knowledge and wisdom and the differences among us, and our conflicts of interest with friends, neighbors, relatives and lovers. All are topics of the sciences of human nature.

- Steven Pinker

The Greeks' concern with immortality grew out of their experience of an immortal nature and immortal gods which together surrounded the individual lives of mortal men. Imbedded in a cosmos where everything was immortal, mortality became the hallmark of human existence. Men are “the mortals,” the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of a species whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation. The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.

- Hannah Arendt

Thematic Option Honors Program
USC College of Letters, Arts & Sciences
University of Southern California

Background and Purpose

The Thematic Option Honors Program, part of the 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 "This Mortal Coil" 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 three to five students, with a faculty member or Thematic Option writing instructor serving as the panel's chair and respondent. A questions and answer session follows the presentation of papers in each panel.

Student Conference Coordinators:

Anuj Aggarwal
Elysse Applebaum
Lisa M. Carrillo
Nathan Dahlin
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Veronica Renov
Cynthia Schuessler
Emily Shearer
Matias Sueldo

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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Bodies on the Line

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Room A

Andrea Chin

Suicide as Personal Liberation in *'night Mother*

When does committing suicide empower the individual rather than signify personal failure or existential despair? The mother-daughter pair of Marsha Norman's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *'night Mother*, grapple with this issue as the latter, Jessie, chooses to kill herself. Jessie's suicide is her one means of self-assertion, reclaiming control over her life as she rejects the bonds of societal institutions such as family and marriage that have not provided her with existential purpose. I examine her motivations and decision in view of terror management theory, which explores how people cope with the knowledge that life is inherently meaningless.

Angela Forsyth

Hunger Artists in Surrealism: Women's Metaphorical and Physical Starvation

When hungry, we eat and are satisfied. But what happens when this hunger isn't satisfied? Or worse, when it is ignored? Women have had a metaphorical hunger brewing in them as a result of inequalities suffered in the past (and present) at the hands of male supremacy. Leonora Carrington expresses this hunger via her Surrealist stories in *House of Fear*, illuminating the parallels between women's metaphorical hunger and a literal hunger. In "Down Under," Carrington's female character uses starvation as a tool to garner power, showing how women's eating disorders are a physical manifestation of their mental hunger. I will address how Carrington's fictional stories illuminate a potential cause that medical science doesn't address behind women's literal hunger: women's metaphorical hunger physically manifests itself in the form of eating disorders. Women starve themselves to exert the only power that hasn't been taken from them by families, lovers, et cetera. Their consumption, or lack thereof, is a testament to the strong link between mind and body; mental hunger can manifest itself in physical form. Carrington's stories show how for women the act of eating is a metaphor for compliance and starving a metaphor for protest.

Gregory S. McDonald

The Ambiguity of Conscientious Objection

Merriam-Webster defines a conscientious objector as "a person who refuses to serve in the armed forces or bear arms on moral or religious grounds," but an exact definition for the term is hard to pin down. Until just a few decades ago, the U.S. only granted conscientious objector status to individuals with strong religious pacifist beliefs. Although the guidelines have been broadened somewhat, the issue remains unsettled. This paper will explore three areas: (1) the Supreme Court decisions determining the current legal definition of a conscientious objector, (2) the problems with this definition, and the broader dilemma inherent in trying to treat all religious and moral beliefs equally, and (3) alternative approaches to the conscientious objection issue. In the world we live in today, conscientious objection is not only relevant to our soldiers fighting in Iraq, but could become of momentous importance to each and every one of us overnight. The time is now to give the issue the attention that it deserves.

Misty Ann Oka

**Misery Loves Company:
Communities of Suffering in Film**

Why is suffering integral in the formation of communities? In both *Fight Club* and *Sunset Boulevard*, the protagonists create communities based on shared pain and suffering as an alternative to an unfulfilling real-world experience. Despite their different motivations, both the Narrator of *Fight Club* and Norma Desmond of *Sunset Boulevard* use their communities of shared suffering to fill an emotional void. My essay explores such communities in terms of these two films as well as research conducted on social isolation and stress disorders. By doing so, I hope to understand the significance of suffering as a contributor to the formation of communities and to encourage readers to view films as valuable sources of social commentary instead of mere entertainment.

Carly Olson

**From Sexuality to Censorship:
Breakfast at Tiffany's Evolution from Naughty Novella to Mild-Mannered Movie**

How did Truman Capote's original 1951 novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, featuring a brazenly wild New York socialite, become so censored in its filmic adaptation? This paper explores how, through the alteration of subtle details and dialogue, Blake Edwards' 1961 film adaptation reconstructs Capote's original characters into more acceptable versions of themselves who fulfill standardized gender roles. This censored portrayal is mandated both by the medium itself - for instance, describing nudity and *showing* nudity are two very different things - as well as culture's move towards conservatism due to the domestic ideal that emerged between the novel and film's debuts. Ultimately, by removing all nudity, flagrant references to sexual deviance, and associations with hegemonically undesirable characters, the film tames its leading lady Holly and instead portrays her as the icon of wit, charm, and elegant glamour. Rather than allowing a questionable male lead, the film removes the novel's many references to the narrator's homosexuality and further solidifies his masculinity by giving him a mistress. These two changes allow for the transformation of the characters' original asexual relationship into the film's Hollywood romance and cinematic ending, where Paul (the film's version of the narrator) is able to be Holly's hero, eventually winning her over. Interestingly, the film is able to maintain a relatively close adaptation by using Capote's original story line (with the exception of the ending), the majority of his scenes, and even the vast majority of his dialogue. Through subtle manipulations in the situations presented, the film is able to satisfactorily tone down the aberrant sexuality of its characters and perpetuate the myth of traditional gender ideals conquering sexual promiscuity.

Control Freaks

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Room B

Reshem Agarwal

The Man in Every Wo(man): Examining Gender Roles in Hijuelos' *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*

Leaving behind the familiar is daunting for Cuban-American immigrants like Cesar and Nestor Castillo. These brothers confront the difficult dilemma of re-identifying oneself in a place far from home, often through musical and sexual expression. Where issues of racial identity meet with the psychological dejection felt by outsiders, gender roles undergo cultural reconstruction. Traditional Latin machismo, characterized by exaggerated masculinity, is a stereotypical component of Cuban culture. The Castillo brothers' treatment of women reflects an attempt to establish this male dominance and consequently redefine themselves. The female response to sexual and emotional oppression varies. Both male and female immigrants face conflicts with preserving their heritage while assimilating in American culture.

J. Benjamin Armstrong

Bottoms Up!: Alcohol as a Tool in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Drink up! It's no secret that, throughout Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, each character drinks enough alcohol to sterilize a small country. But why is it that they consume so much? Would it really be the same if George had chosen an Appletini over that snifter of brandy? By studying the amount and type of alcohol, as well as the time at which it is consumed, we can gain a new insight into the subconscious conniving nature of these characters as they travel the steady descent into one hellish night. Instead of succumbing to intoxication, each character employs alcohol to fuel his or her own devilish motives for the evening. So bottoms up – we've got a long night ahead of us.

Andie Aronow

Desires, Recollection, and the Suppression of The Self

In my paper, I explore the status of love and memory and argue that suppression and regulation of the self is necessary in order to be a productive participant in society. I write about love as a temptation, a vice and an obstacle, and look at two characters' journeys to suppress their desires and recollections, betraying their true identities, in order to face the future and live less painfully. I analyze two texts; firstly, I look at James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. I critique the protagonist, David, and his choice to resist his homosexual urges, suppressing his true self and his passion. David eliminates the shameful, lustful and unconventional pieces of his life, hoping to overcome his unacceptable desires and live a peaceful, socially permissible life. I also analyze Michel Gondry's, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and study Clementine Kruczynski's choice to erase her mind of memories regarding her old lover, Joel. Clementine finds pain in nostalgia and decides that eliminating her memories will help her move on and find happiness in the future.

**Feeling Out of Touch:
Existence and Angst in Sartre's *Nausea***

Antoine Roquentin is trapped – he extends his hand into the world, but he feels nothing. Instead, things touch *him* and blatantly confront *him* with their emptiness – leaving him confused and overwhelmed with an uneasiness, a certain nausea. As a historian, Roquentin has been researching the Marquis de Rollebon in Bouville – however, one day he suddenly becomes distraught over his own existence and whether it has any meaning. He considers what exactly is the difference between his life and that of a table or a tree (if there even is one). The basis of this research is *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre. My analysis is framed with Existentialism, specifically, Sartre's notions of "existence precedes essence" and "bad faith" and Hiedegger's "angst." This study is an examination of the uniquely human condition of mortality and consciousness that seeks to identify angst as the unavoidable result of man's confrontation with his own existence. Previously unable to cope with his confliction, Roquentin acquiesced to his angst and lived in "bad faith." Nevertheless, liberation lies in the rejection of artificial constructs of "human essence." To reach this conclusion, my argument is comprised of three parts: Man must (1) realize the false notion of a "human essence" (the cause), (2) embrace Sartrean "transcendence" (the means) and (3) accept his existence as is (the resolution). For Roquentin, salvation and liberation lies in his decision to live his life rather than fear "nothingness."

Abigail Mengers

**Gambling with Life:
Widespread Prescription Drug Use in the 1960s-70s as Seen in Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays***

In *Play It As It Lays*, Joan Didion chronicles the downward spiral of young aspiring actress Maria Wyeth in late 1960s Hollywood. One could easily find the descriptions of adultery, abuse, and anorexia in the novel next to Brittany's latest exploit in today's tabloids. However, the intimate and heartbreaking portrait of Maria's gradual descent into indifference and her eventual placement in a mental institution probe the underlying causes and reflect the debilitating effects of the widespread prescription drug abuse prevalent among privileged women of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Using medical studies from this time period and critical social analyses, this paper suggests the rigid patriarchal structure still in place despite the appearance of second-wave feminism to be the root of this mass drug problem singular to women. These findings also explore the prescription and use of these drugs as social tools, which left women even more passive to the reigning cultural forces surrounding them by inhibiting their ability to change their social situation. Not until radical feminism emerged as an alternative option to sedatives and amphetamines in the 1970s did women kick the habit and break away.

Growing Pains

Tuesday, April 10
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

Jen Guyton

Youth and Terrorism: A Premature Mortality

A suicide bombing involves the ultimate sacrifice. The terrorist in question will leave everything earthly behind – friends, family, possessions – for the promise of a heavenly paradise instead. It seems counterintuitive that young men and women, barely out of childhood, are so willing to give up everything they may have ahead of them in life. Normally we think of the elderly as those who prepare themselves to face the Grim Reaper. So why are there so many ready and willing young terrorists? Ahmad in John Updike's *Terrorist* is barely eighteen and embarking upon a suicide bombing mission. He is one of what Eric Hoffer calls "temporary misfits: People who have not found their place in life but still hope to find it." He is well represented by Lois T. Flaherty's model of adolescence, providing some explanation for his tumble into terrorism. The fact that Ahmad does not actually commit the act of terror is perhaps the most diagnostic aspect of the story: the whims and fluctuations of youth are almost assuredly Ahmad's illness. By portraying Ahmad in this way, Updike critiques the role of youth in terrorism. He presents this role as equivocal and wavering - an insincere consequence of their adolescence. Updike thereby points out the tragic ease of the seduction of children into a violent political cause.

Lisa Kourakos

Falling to Pieces: Fragmentation as a Means of Reconciliation

September 11th had heartbreaking effects on multitudes of people, but when you are a precocious nine-year-old experiencing this trauma, the effects are profoundly shattering. In investigating Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, this paper will examine how it is sometimes through fragmentation of people and events - rather than construction of memorials or monuments - that we can overcome death. In this paper, I look at death and child psychology and how children and society confront traumatic experience. Can we cope? What comes after? *How* do we deal with the after-effects of trauma when we still desperately want to preserve what was lost?

Skylar Shephard

Satisfying Flesh and Spirit: Love, Lust, and Learning in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*

Through readings of stories from Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, this paper explores one of the essential processes of becoming a mature adult, specifically for young women: realizing that love and sex do not always go hand in hand and understanding the roles they play in male-female relationships. I argue that the process of reaching sexual maturity begins with the shocking realization of the existence of a patriarchal and phallogocentric society in which women are treated as if their sexual needs do not exist and are expected to repress their desires in order to satisfy those of men, just like the young bride in "The Bloody Chamber." After this loss of romantic idealism, women must learn to embrace their sexuality and to find out what they really want in a relationship. Carter asserts that there is no universal standard for the way in which men and women experience love and sex, but rather sexuality and romance are shaped and determined by the social and economic constraints of the relationship, as seen in the varying sexual experiences of the female characters in the different fairy tales Carter writes. The final stage of the process of sexual maturity then becomes the finding of a balance between love,

lust, and a sexual relationship that satisfies both flesh and spirit. Women and men must learn to appreciate sex for what it is, rather than hold it to an unachievable ideal or degrade it to the point where the participants lose their humanity. As seen in the endings of Carter's fairy tales, only when sex is put in the proper perspective and both man and woman can freely express their desires can real love and affection exist.

William Velarde

**“Never Too Late to Get It Back”:
Yearning for Youth in *American Beauty***

Mid-life crises are an unfortunate cliché of aging in contemporary Western society, bringing with it feelings of inferiority and meaninglessness. In Alan Ball's *American Beauty* the protagonist, Lester Burnham, suffers from such a crisis at the story's onset. He lacks any sense of meaning or purpose in his roles as husband, father, and provider. However, in an attempt to absolve himself of this malaise, Lester seeks to reconnect with his youthful lack of responsibility. In the process, however, he actually grows further into his role as an adult, paradoxically gaining a sense of maturity and peace from his attempts to remove himself from society's expectations. I will explore the role of general nostalgia for an aging period across generations to reveal the similarities inherent to the process, as demonstrated by Lester's journey in *American Beauty*.

Brandon Wong

**Salvador's Sexuality:
Gala and “The Invisible Man”**

One source of artistic energy, among many, is unfulfilled sexual desires and fears. Salvador Dalí, nicknamed “Avida Dollars” by Breton because of his desire for fame and money, is renowned for his surreal, dream-like paintings that seem to capture a variety of themes and motifs. Always on the lookout for public attention, Dalí was an imaginative artist whose art often drew widespread interest for its sexually-charged nature. Dalí's perceptions of sex and sexuality can be analyzed by looking at his paintings, especially by comparing his work before meeting his wife Gala to those he painted post-Gala. His later paintings suggest that his relationship with Gala allowed him to explore themes of personal responsibility for sexuality in the face of sexual fears. I will be looking at paintings from both of these periods and examining both the progression of his sexual fears and his accompanying responsibility, specifically the way both crystallized in his later works.

Mind Over Matters

Tuesday, April 10

6:00 – 7:15 p.m.

Pub

Benjamin R. Claffin

Falling from Stardom: Victims of Fame

Fame: for some it is the ultimate achievement. Yet perhaps fame is not as glorious as it seems, as it takes a brutal toll on the mind, creating false notions of immortal life. To explore these psychological effects of celebrity, I will inspect examples of those consumed by their own distinction, Oscar Hijuelos' character Cesar Castillo in *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* and the late real-life Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain. Using texts such as David Giles' *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity*, I shall try to uncover the mystery behind attempting to become immortal through fame.

Vanessa Kuroda

A Peek into Ultraviolence: Exploring Technology's Effect on Man

With the rise of technology making our lives “easier” and less burdened with menial tasks, it seems we are constantly looking deeper for novelty and excitement, for any kind of emotion that is not numbed by our reliance on machinery. The main characters of *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess and *Crash* by J.G. Ballard, Alex and Vaughan, commit atrocious acts of violence they do not feel remorse for, leading us to question what their motivation is and where it originates. In this paper, I examine the sources of such unconventional behavior and argue that technology causes the depersonalization of Alex and Vaughan, with both grappling with the subject in extreme, often disturbing ways. *A Clockwork Orange* suggests technology's role in deviance, whereas *Crash* fully develops this theme. In-depth analysis of the two texts along with critiques of the works reveal that the dehumanizing influence of technology forces people to search harder to feel emotion, resulting in the two emotionally deviant characters of Alex and Vaughan.

Jesse Myers

“Normal” Emotions:

What *Double Indemnity* and *Looking for Spinoza* Reveal of the Spectrum and Mechanisms of Human Feeling

How does a serial murderer become such a twisted human being? Antonio Damasio's work in *Looking For Spinoza* supports the possibility that an affinity for violence coupled with past experiences can precipitate a downward spiral resulting in madmen. The key is in feelings and the mechanisms of the brain. By reinforcing the neural pathways of violence and linking acts of violence to a surge of chemicals like adrenaline, an individual may alter their brain to the point where they enjoy inflicting pain the same way normal humans enjoy roller coasters or sex. In the case of Phyllis Nirdlinger from *Double Indemnity*, the experiences that have led her to insanity are clearly provided by the author. Phyllis traveled a slippery slope, indulging her affinity for death and developing a hardened, skewed perspective of death. Her feelings towards the thrill of death reinforced themselves by physiologically altering the brain to strengthen the circuit promoting death as a thrill. Thus, it's the brain's reaction to violence that can cause a person to become a murderer as a substitute for missing “normal” quotas of excitement, sexual arousal, or satisfaction. When these “normal” circuits are not exercised, their physiological roles are assumed by those that are: violence, in this case.

Leah Sargent

**Fade to White:
Erasure of a Broken Nature**

There is an obvious distortion of communication in Cha's *Dictée*, apparent in facets including its uncaptioned images, its broken speech, and its untranslated, multilingual nature. The frustrations this causes a reader mirror those of the work itself and, instead of convoluting an understanding of the text, cause its nonlinear nature to become more personally identifiable. In exploring this phenomenon, I will look at the psycholinguistic nature of Cha's communication dilemma, drawing from analyses of Cha's work, texts pertaining to trauma theory, and the psychological ramifications of the types of trauma brokenly expressed by the author. In seeking a solution to the broken nature of the deeply affected, isolated person, I will delve into the implications of the *tabula rasa* for which the narrative repeatedly yearns.

Casey Stark

In Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, we are presented with a psychiatrist who becomes suspicious of the ethics of his own practice. This paper uses this suspicion to investigate the ethics and logic behind modern anti-depressant treatments. Why is it so easy for us to make the assumption that eliminating sadness and anxiety is the best for an individual and what leads us to this assumption? Do happy people make for a better society or is this decision truly made for the individual? What gives us the right (and reason) to suppress and refashion the emotions of another person? Textual examples from *Prozac Nation* will help to answer most of these questions by presenting us with a case study of a young woman's struggle with depression and her medication.

Time and Again

Monday, April 10
6:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Room C

Alicia Hergenroeder

Tick, Tock Go the Masculine Hands of the Clock: Male Definition of Women through the Medium of Time

Time weighs heavily on the characters of Marsha Norman's drama *'night Mother*; clocks mark the set and references to time litter the mother-daughter dialogue. Both mother, Thelma, and daughter, Jessie, have relationships with time that parallel their relationships with men. Much criticism defines this work as feminist, highlighting women's confinement to a male context. These same critics characterize Jessie's suicide as proactive, claiming that through death, she escapes the constraints of a male-dominated system. This suicide cannot be triumphant, however: time, a man-made concept, forces her to this end, making Jessie time's victim not its victor. Time renders Thelma helpless as well by inculcating her reliance upon routine for fulfillment and definition. Each woman surrenders herself to time through the enculturation of obedience. Through the women's submission, it becomes apparent that time and men are not only connected, but time becomes an extension of male influence.

Katie Kelly

Defying Chronology: Conceptions of Time in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

This paper discusses the role of time as an ordering principle in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel takes place not only over a linear time structure, but is also held together by streams of consciousness, which create shape. However, rather than following a strictly linear or thematic course, *Mrs. Dalloway* unfolds in a way that is representative of Bergson's concepts of time, divided into both *temps* and *durée*. Both conceptions of time are woven together and build upon one another throughout the novel, suggesting that neither alone can fully account for the human experience. In structuring the novel in this fashion, Woolf attempts to convey a more thorough and accurate representation of daily life.

Briana LaBriola

***Dictée* as a Lens to Suffering and the Human Experience**

How should literature engage with trauma to accurately portray all of its dimensions? Should it perhaps attempt to repress these awful memories so as to protect survivors? Or should it directly remind us continually of these tragedies so as to prevent future atrocities? Theresa Hak Kyung Cha explores this question in her experimental work *Dictée* and ultimately rejects both conceptions. She instead postulates her own answer throughout her construction of *Dictée*, proposing that literature should alternatively, in the words of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, circuitously "encircle the site of the trauma." This paper investigates *Dictée's* portrayal of trauma, specifically referencing the politics of speech regarding trauma and the de- and re-constructions of community that trauma forces. Within the theoretical framework provided by Caruth's ideas in trauma studies, and her investigations of the use of literary devices to give witness to otherwise unspeakable traumatic experiences, this paper exposes the implications of *Dictée's* depictions of trauma upon its own storytelling, exploring how the fragmentation of its own structure and narrative illustrates the actuality of trauma.

Steve McDonagh

In Memory of the Mambo

The past weighs heavily on Cesar Castillo in Oscar Hijuelos' *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*. This paper will investigate how nostalgia shapes Cesar's life after his brother Nestor's death, when he begins to reject a life in the present for a reliving of one in the past. These memories facilitate Cesar's slow deterioration, with music serving as both an enabler of his stagnation and a release from his demons. By examining the role of music in his descent into nostalgia, this paper will explore how the comfort of old memories prevents Cesar from trying to make new ones.

Phil Zager

“Like the Roman Empire”: The Special Past in Coppola's *The Godfather: Part II*

With six Academy Awards, and the #3 ranking on the Internet Movie Database, *The Godfather: Part II* is both critically and commercially legendary. One of the many unique features of the film is how it is both sequel and prequel to the original film. Writer/producer/director Francis Ford Coppola constructs contrasting narratives of the father's past and the son's present, the events preceding and following the first film. In this paper, I view the film through the lens of Fred Davis' theory of the “special past.” Davis proposes that when life is going wrong in the present, we fondly look back towards the idealized past. Through close reading key scenes in the film, I will show how Coppola proves Davis's theory in his film with both story content and cinematography.

Bodily Functions

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Room A

Emilio Borghesan

The Mind and the Body: A Healing Synergy

How closely are the mind and the body intertwined? Long ago, Hippocrates observed that the body has a natural tendency to heal itself. Much of the body's ability to heal itself derives from the mind's attitude towards the healing process. Norman Cousins argues in *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient* that there are many mental phenomena instrumental in the healing of the body. The placebo effect is important in the process of bodily healing, as is laughter, optimism, and a general feeling that you have goals to accomplish in life. Placebos (as do positive mental states) have the ability to change the mind's response to injury to one of optimism. Scientifically, this increased optimism results in the release of natural opiates which aid the body's recovery. Conversely, a feeling of pessimism and hopelessness about a chronic injury is likely to prolong the injury and increase the pain. Norman Cousins found that, "10 minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would provide [him] at least two hours of pain-free sleep." This shows that the healing process is more successful when the treatment approaches both the mind and body of patients. Through a study of the healing process, my paper attempts to show that the mind and the body are one. There is no duality, as what happens in the mind affects the body and changes in the body affect the mind.

Clare Doody

A Coil which will not Spring: Captivity and the Body in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

Helga Crane, the biracial protagonist of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, illustrates that the essence of "this mortal coil" is our entrapment within our corporeal body. Forced to contend with both racism and prejudice against the sexual implications of her biracial identity, she provides an extreme example of the way in which the skin we inhabit informs not only others' preconceptions of us, but also our own actions. The failure of Helga's final, desperate turn towards religion, the ultimate proponent of life beyond the corporeal, illustrates the inescapability of this confinement.

Emily Kallen

"The Unseen Part of Us which Spreads Wide": *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*

This essay discusses how humanity extends beyond physicality, beyond "this mortal coil," in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Characters align emotionally without having interacted physically and Stephen Daldry's film *The Hours* provides visual representations and interpretations for these connections. While both the novel and the film show signs of Woolf's depression and suicidal mentality, *The Hours* traces her downfall and its effects in relation to the other characters. My essay addresses all of these elements as nonphysical extensions. Not only did Woolf write about the transcendental connections between characters, she also inserted herself into the text, which Daldry brought to life in the film.

**To Live and (not) Die in the Digital Age:
The Changing Definition of Life in the Age of Cyberpunk**

“Technologies are becoming better life support systems for our images than for our bodies.
Images are immortal, bodies are ephemeral.”
- Stelarc, “Towards the Post human.”

In my paper I use quotes like Stelarc's to explore the very definition of the mortal coil, or human life, given new technological advances. I explore characters, present in the Cyberpunk works, who exist without a physical body. I then extrapolate what this means about life itself, in this new age. I first argue that certain characters, by recording some aspect of themselves and living after death achieve something that man has been questing for thousands of years: a total divorce from all of the needs of the flesh, the animal impulses and even death. I then turn my attention to creations made entirely of data. These artificial intelligences attack the very idea of life, for once they can pass a Turing test, it is hard to prove that they are not human, despite being nothing more than lines of code in a computer system. I argue, therefore that, anything capable of growth and learning, a evolutionary reproduction is a, and most importantly death, is alive, whether it has a physical body or not.

Olga Tomchin

**Sex, Piety, and Politics in the Context of Hair:
The Headscarf Girls in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow***

Throughout history, women's hair and its presentation have consistently been seen as a symbol of sensuality. Since the control and regulation of sex and the body are such major concerns of religion, religious fundamentalism often has very defined ideas about how hair should be displayed. In recent times, hair's treatment has been particularly visible in Islam. While the Qur'an specifically recommends that a woman wear a hijab, or veil, as a method of protection from possible harassment and to distinguish herself as a devout Muslim, the act of wearing a hijab has now taken on many complex dimensions. As evidenced in Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*, a headscarf often goes beyond merely symbolizing piety and modesty. In light of political Islam, a hijab can now represent an entire movement toward the adoption of Sharia law and establishment of an Islamic society. Additionally, the veil can represent a deliberate de-sexualizing of oneself and a feminist effort to be viewed as completely outside of one's attractiveness. Alternately, when forced, the hijab can be a means of misogynistic coercion and oppression.

Cogs in the Machine

Monday, April 10
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Room B

Clara Abello

The Search for Identity: Heritage and Homeland in *The Namesake*

Searching and finding one's identity is one of the most challenging tasks someone can undertake and in *The Namesake*, this task is complicated for Gogol Ganguli because although he is immersed in an American community, his family aggressively seeks to preserve their Indian heritage. Gogol feels that at times the two cultures have conflicting demands on him and so he feels forced to choose between them. This conflict is present throughout his life and culminates in his drastic decision to change his name from Gogol, a Russian name, to Nikhil, an Indian name, at the age of 18. Through research into the psychological implications of emigrating to a foreign land and the idea of "American-Born Conflicted Deshi," my paper explores the difficulties immigrants face in their attempts at assimilation into another culture. Whether or not two cultures can simultaneously exist within someone's identity is just one of the questions that Gogol's struggles will shed light on, perhaps revealing that it is not the final outcome that matters, but what one learns during the conflict that means the most.

Brittany Crawshaw

What's So Funny?

Where does humor come from? Is it something innately within us? Is it an outward projection of our personalities, our souls? Or could it be a defense mechanism? After all, humans are distinctly self-aware; most significantly, we are aware of our impending deaths. As Jim Morrison said, "No one here gets out alive." And doesn't that knowledge place a certain burden on our day-to-day existence? Doesn't that make our lives all the more serious, all the more frightening? Yet, we don't hold our breaths, immobilized by fear. We live. We laugh. So could it be that humor is our way of coping with the fact that we will die and that all our questions about God, the soul, the meaning of life - all that actually "matters" - go unanswered? Is laughter our survival instinct? Mike Nichols' film *Will*, provides a good platform to explore this theory. In the film, Emma Thompson plays a wry professor diagnosed with terminal ovarian cancer. The film identifies humor as her guard - against other humans, against emotion, against what is too overwhelming to accept - but it also explores humor as a link between humans, something essential to humanity that perhaps *makes* meaning out of life.

Miles Killingsworth

Ominous Ignorance: Global Warming in the 21st Century

The 20th century was a period riddled with tragedy on an unprecedented scale: wars, pandemics, and natural disasters combined with an exploding global population, resulting in "the bloodiest century in history." An examination of these tragedies shows that far too many could have been mitigated or prevented outright, suggesting an almost willful ignorance of forthcoming disaster. As a result of similar ignorance, global warming may soon be added to the list of preventable tragedies. Some models indicate that the effects of global warming will reduce the world's economy by as much as 20%, a number consistent with the type of devastation endemic in Europe during and after the World Wars. While there remains little rational debate surrounding cause and effects of global warming, there is a systemic failure to respond to the crisis on the necessary scale, and there is no indication that this trend will reverse. Poised on the brink of tragedy, it appears as though we are choosing to jump in, head first.

Elaine Martin

Telepathy as Instant Messaging: Communication in *Midnight's Children*

In my paper, I discuss how *Midnight's Children* can be seen as a prophetic foretelling of many of today's technological advances in communication. Focusing first on the depiction of Saleem's ability as a "magic radio," the essay shows how his ability is more aptly described as a chat room. The essay also draws on John J. Su's ideas on form and community in *Midnight's Children*, as well as the USC Annenberg Digital Future Project in order to explore society's dependence on the Internet and the connections people feel to their virtual communities, much like the connection felt by the children in Rushdie's book.

L. Nathan Perkins

Waning Individuality in Light of Emergence

Emergence has been defined as, "the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems." This concept, which is central to biological sciences, is also quite relevant in larger scale systems such as corporations, economic markets and even the Internet. These emergent systems are capable of far more than any of the individuals could accomplish, creating everything from engineering feats like space travel to the remarkably thorough source of information that is Wikipedia. But as technology has enabled vastly larger systems, the role of the individual in society is rapidly changing. It seems that these emergent systems have mitigated the value of an individual's contribution to the larger society. With this, people have become more of a commodity to the larger emergent systems, with individual suffering often overlooked. Based on the writing of economists, philosophers, and even the changing idea of heroes within society, it is clear that a new form of individualism has emerged: one that is not focused on individual influence, but instead achieved through targeted, personalized consumerism, such as Netflix with 75,000 movie titles or iTunes with 3.5 million songs.

Designing Women

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Banquet Room

Amanda Herman

Born to be Wild: Sexuality's Impact on One's Innate Wildness

The taboo representation of lesbians is discussed in Terry Castle's "The Apparitional Lesbian." Castle repeatedly describes lesbians as "ghosts" who are looked over due to their potential threat to society's gender hegemony. The concept commonly attached to the identifier "lesbian" is that this woman sets "herself apart...as an outlaw and troublemaker." But these stereotypes are not simply associated with the term; it is determined by their "lesbian subjectivity," or how they would act in both the "realms of action and of erotic desire." In Gertrude Stein's short story, "The Good Anna," Anna's homoerotic tendencies are consistently implied but are never directly stated. Because Anna still maintains her lesbian subjectivity, although her own self-identification remains apparitional, her character still stands as an example of a "girl gone wild" in society.

Ashley Stefan

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Gender Insecurity

In *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, Oscar Hijuelos uses very sexual imagery to describe and define the relationships between the male and female characters in the novel. It is namely the sexuality and machismo used by the men in their objectification of certain women that creates gender roles that are culture specific and worth investigating. The varying relationships, most blatantly sexual, are implied or described by the mambo, which is the music of machismo and of the Latin culture. It represents the insecurities of the men and their struggle to find their own niche, at the same time representing their male dominance over women. The struggles of the characters to find their places among each other as men and women are indicative of their struggle for freedom or liberation.

David Stephens

Disrupting the Gaze: The Subversion of Scopophilia in the Films of David Lynch

In her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that the gaze of film is one of identification toward the male and objectification of the female. According to Mulvey, males are visually coded as active, while females are coded as passive objects from which the viewer derives scopophilic pleasure – that is, pleasure simply from looking. This paper examines the way Mulvey's critique of narrative cinema applies to the films of David Lynch, who is known for his portrayal of strong, active women. Although Mulvey's article has been criticized for not applying to films with strong females as the lead, Lynch's females work perfectly within the context of Mulvey's argument. Lynch's films, particularly *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive*, contradict not only the traditional passive representation Mulvey posits, but also the way in which the traditional film gaze is configured. Lynch's films do not act as an argument against Mulvey; instead they reaffirm her argument by subverting the gaze Mulvey outlined over 30 years ago. In *Blue Velvet* Lynch directly reverses the male to female scopophilic gaze, and his non-conformity to the classical rules of continuity editing in *Mulholland Drive* disrupt the gaze temporally and spatially. Through these and various other techniques, Lynch detracts from the audience's ability to take pleasure in looking.

Natalie Thom

The China Doll's House

"I have been your doll-wife," declares Nora Helmer before leaving her husband in Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House*. A hundred years later, the female protagonist of Richard Brautigan's novel *Sombrero Fallout*, Yukiko, perpetuates the cycle of the woman-as-doll in her relationship with the unnamed American humorist. Ironically, as a girl Yukiko disliked her stepfather, who called her "China doll," but she chooses a relationship with a man who treats her in much the same way. Yukiko, unlike Nora, does not recognize that her sense of self is destroyed by this relationship; she left the humorist because loving him drained her, not because she felt there was anything wrong with the way he saw her. While Ibsen called for the emancipation of women from the doll-world created for them by men, Brautigan indicates that contemporary society prompts many modern women to choose to be treated like dolls.

Lisa Weisdorf

Only the Beginning of the Word Hope: The Portrayal of Nadja in *Nadja*

A particularly compelling photomontage published in a 1929 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* consists of sixteen photographic portraits of male Surrealists. Their eyes closed, they encircle a Magritte painting of a female nude with the inscription, "Je ne vois pas la / cachée dans la forêt" ("I do not see the / hidden in the forest"). As Susan Suleiman notes in *Subversive Intent*, this photomontage seems "to be an emblem of the Surrealist subject, who does not need to see the woman in order to imagine her, placing her at the center but only as an image." In this paper, I attempt to answer the questions of how and why André Breton's *Nadja* can be read as a written translation of the message of this photomontage. I examine Breton's depiction of Nadja as a ghost-like and incomplete sketch of a human being - a portrayal that is epitomized in Nadja's name, which is only "the beginning of the word hope" in Russian - and explore the consequences of this depiction. Is Breton debasing Nadja? Elevating her? Using her? This paper will provide the beginning of an answer.

Surface Tension

Tuesday, April 10

7:30 – 8:45 p.m.

Pub

Tyler Beebe

From Railroads to Robots: The Perils of an Easier Life

Ever since the beginning of the industrial revolution and the advent of the railroad, humans have had to make choices between what is familiar and what is more efficient. As Wolfgang Schivelbush explores in *The Railway Journey*, because people did not know how the railroad worked, they were initially not willing to trust it, but as time went on, the railroad was integrated into society and became a part of everyday life. Today we face many similar questions of how far we want technology to take us, and the genre of science fiction offers perspectives on how our future will turn out. The film *Blade Runner* serves as a cautionary tale of what could happen if our pursuit of efficiency leads to a system where our very identity is compromised, and man is no longer distinct from the machines he makes. In the future, instead of the railroad replacing the less efficient horse-drawn carriage, if our pursuit of technology continues, it could be the machine that is replacing the less efficient organic human.

Sara Chang

An Illusion of Truth

Prejudices form when one crosses the line between fantasy and reality. Racial stereotypes, specifically Orientalism as addressed in the play *M. Butterfly*, seem to sprout from simple fantasies and desires of the characters. Edward Said's book *Orientalism* and articles by critics James Moy and Andrew Shin explore Western fantasies of power over the East that fuel a French diplomat's own illusion of obtaining the supposedly perfect woman: an obedient and submissive Oriental. It is these small fantasies, beginning to masquerade as truths, which create the preconceptions and stereotypes that *M. Butterfly* addresses; fantasies that appear real enough to even die for.

Sam Geer

Your Eyes Give You Away: The Effect of Sight in "A Temporary Matter" and "Interpreter of Maladies"

In these two short stories from Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer-prize winning collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, eyesight plays a key role in the internal development of both the male protagonists as well as their female significant others. When these characters use sight simply to make observations or when sight is obstructed, they begin to believe in imagined realities, to give their lives a purpose that does not actually exist. However, when these characters make reciprocal, shared eye contact with each other, these notions of purpose and fantasies of a better life are immediately and heart-wrenchingly shattered. The use of human sight in Lahiri's work is an unparalleled tool for story development: it is dualistic in that it both motivates her characters but is also the cause of their undoing.

Kimberly Goswiler

Don't Disappear Here: Los Angeles's Cultural Void in *Less Than Zero* Examined through Existential Psychology

Existential psychology's Terror Management Theory (TMT) maintains that culture provides refuge from existential anxiety, feelings of meaninglessness and fear that ensue from people's consciousness of impending death. The TMT asserts that when faced with reminders of their mortality, people modify their own behaviors and qualities to match those that their culture most esteems. Audacious behaviors, sensual pleasures, and physical appearances are highly valued in the risqué and superficial Los Angeles depicted in Brett Easton Ellis's popular 1985 novel *Less Than Zero*. It follows that protagonist Clay's risky conduct as well as his considerable maintenance and liberal indulgence of his beautiful body are his primary weapons against existential anxiety. Conversely, existential psychology alleges that both risk taking and excessive concentration on the body's unsettlingly temporary physical form bring mortality to mind. Consequently, Clay's culture does not supply him with the means to combat sensations of emptiness and anxieties about death. *Less Than Zero* exposes posh 1980s Los Angeles as a culture whose hollow values appear to defy culture's therapeutic merit and deny Clay evasion of existential anxiety.

Nicholas Wisniewski

Duchamp's Endgame: Chess as an Escape from Retinal Art

To what degree does medium define art? For most of human history, art remained purely in the realm of the visual – the “high art” of paintings, sculptures and texts. Only in the last century and a half has the definition changed to encompass less traditional forms. The Dada and Surrealist movements spearheaded this change, and began to question the relationships between medium and art itself. One such questioner was Marcel Duchamp, whose “ready-made” sculptures argued for a new definition: that art depended purely on intent and interpretation. In his public statements, Duchamp repeatedly called for the abandonment of so called “retinal art” – that which depended on visual contemplation to be understood. Despite his critical success and impact, Duchamp left the art world after less than two decades to pursue a career as a professional chess player and published on the intricacies of futile endgames. This paper will explore the possibility that Duchamp never left art at all, by interpreting chess play as the culmination of his attempt to escape “retinal art,” and instead create art on a purely intellectual level.

What Women Want

Tuesday, April 10
7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
Room C

Jean Chen

Identity and the Repulsion from Home in *The Bell Jar*

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is about scholarship-winning Esther Greenwood, who gradually descends into madness from the overwhelming anxiety she experiences about her future. Ideally, she would become whatever she wants after college, but she realizes that her possible futures are mutually exclusive; she can either fulfill societal expectation for her as a woman by marrying, or dedicate herself to the intellectual realm by becoming a poet, professor, or editor. Though the home usually provides some sort of comfort during difficult times, Esther's home only amplifies her anxieties about what she wants to do with her life. Her main fear of the home arises from her fear of losing her intellectual freedom, as well as marriage's potential ability to make her brainless and subordinate. Although she views the home, marriage and all that they entail as oppressive, she is not willing to completely give up on the idea of raising a happy family; in fact, the reader knows from the beginning of the novel that Esther has a baby. In this paper, I explore how Esther's idea of a home forms her identity.

Rose Kirby

Escape Plans: Insanity as a Solution to Patriarchal Oppression in *Quicksand* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper* uses insanity to escape the oppressive nature of early mental health care. The parallel usage of the narrator's journaling and Gilman's own writing process effectively protests patriarchal control of women's bodies and minds through the mentally confining rest cure treatment. Gilman's protagonist's successful ascent into madness allows her to reconstruct a new, feminine identity out of the reach of patriarchal power. In contrast, Nella Larsen's Helga Crane in *Quicksand* cannot completely and permanently free herself from reality through insanity. Responding to the constraints of suddenly becoming a mother and housewife while also grappling with the complex issue of being a biracial female, Helga tries to detach her mind from her life's circumstances. However, Helga ultimately returns from her dream-state to take care of her children and continue her life. I propose that Helga Crane's failure to reach a state of freedom through permanent insanity is connected to Helga's inability to create a personal identity outside of patriarchal conceptualizations of the mind. Nella Larsen's own fascination with Freudian psychoanalysis prevents her from developing a character who can escape the confines of patriarchal control because she, as an author, thinks in terms of Freud's patriarchal theories when envisioning human actions and emotions.

Laura Reeve

Surrendering Subjectivity: Women and Existentialism

Women tend to be more dependent on the opinions and lives of others than their masculine counterparts. The women featured in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Woman Destroyed*, as well as de Beauvoir herself, encapsulate the propensity of women to lose sight of themselves as they invest their energy in the people around them. I will discuss how this phenomenon is related to Jean- Paul Sartre's idea of "being for others," as stated in his work *Being and Nothingness*. De Beauvoir demonstrates the susceptibility of women to other people in her collection of short stories and in her own life, exemplifying their tendency to base their beliefs about themselves and their actions on the perceptions of the people around them.

Emily Smith

Women and Terrorism

In Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*, Sihem, the wife of a very integrated Arab–Israeli citizen becomes a suicide bomber. This is a shock to everyone around her because she is viewed as the perfect modern woman, happy with her comfortable home and world traveling, apolitical, unreligious, and certainly not a terrorist. But as a woman she feels as though she needs to do something to make amends for her comfortable life and to stand up for all the people who can't do it for themselves. In the past two decades, there have been over 220 documented women who have given up their life for the jihad- but in the end being a woman gave Sihem the access she needed to commit the attack, as well as motivation she needed to really make a difference.

Daphne Wu

Damsels in Distress or Femme Fatales?:

The Mortal Dimensions of Angela Carter's Heroines in *The Bloody Chamber*

This paper analyzes the importance of Angela Carter's use of complex heroines in her feminist revision of traditionally patriarchal fairy tales. The females in Carter's short stories do not fall under the stereotypical roles of the damsel-in-distress or the femme fatale. Instead, Carter complicates the heroines of "The Bloody Chamber" and "The Erl King" to expose the humanity and sexuality of women trapped under patriarchy. As for sexuality, the heroines are neither naïve nor illicit, but they readily yearn to satisfy their desires. Carter thus reverses Perrault's cautionary morals by showing women as decision makers, instead of innocent victims, that deal effectively with the consequences. She successfully reclaims the fantasies that typecast women to be incapable damsels or evil step-mothers and rewrites the tales in her own powerful feminine voice. Therefore, *The Bloody Chamber* tells the stories of realistic women as an overdue response to the distorted and superficial representations of females in a patriarchal society.

Coping Mechanisms

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Room A

Jeremy Allen

Balenciaga: Back to the Future, Away from Reality

Merely a month before the American invasion of Iraq, a curious phenomenon was observed on Fall 2003 runways: 1960s nostalgia was back in full force. Designer Nicolas Ghesquiere of fashion house Balenciaga produced a landmark collection for the Fall 2006 catwalk that has been heralded not only as an apotheosis of the three-year 1960s trend, but as a fresh, innovative proposal for the future of fashion. By identifying the locus of this current wave of nostalgia as the September 11th, 2001, World Trade Center attacks, I examine couture's relationship to war by distinguishing between the 1960s' space-age optimism and 21st century terror. I contend that by marrying the incongruous stoicism and protection of Cristobal Balenciaga's couture silhouettes with the youthful freedom of later space-age 1960s designers, Ghesquiere produces a haunting collection that speaks to the ambivalence of humanity facing a dire forecast for the future: the desire to regress via nostalgia for uninhibited childhood is checked by the need to shroud oneself from the dangers of the world. Consequently, Ghesquiere renders his models shells of hollow futuristic optimism, too vulnerable to be protected yet too cloaked in maturity to disregard reality.

Stephen Kahan

Hypermortality and the Futility of Hope in *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* and *Blasted*

Hope gets people through the day. It enables individuals to persevere, to overcome the greatest obstacles. However, there is a limit to hope's redeeming value. People often resort to hope and hope's associates, faith and religion, during traumatic events such as the Holocaust. But these special instances of hypermortality, where one is overwhelmed by one's mortal state, cannot be overcome by hope. It is entirely counterproductive, allowing suffering to persist indefinitely. Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman* and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* deal with cases of hypermortality, asserting the uselessness of hope. Moreover, the works themselves are hopeless. They confront the reader with disturbing images, working to counter the impression of art as a distraction from troubles. This forces one to deal directly with the unavoidable misery of hypermortality. Borowski and Kane see hope as Fredrick Nietzsche does: "It is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment." Therefore, they attempt to eradicate hope from art so that art enhances, but does not replace, reality.

Grant Tunkel

The Fragile Bomber

This paper will determine why the psyche of the suicide bomber is very fragile. It will do so through analysis of the character of Ahmad in John Updike's novel *Terrorist*. Ahmad is tapped to carry out a suicide attack, but at the last possible moment, he backs out, and the attack is averted. This paper will prove that Ahmad backs out because he does not fully believe in the cause at hand, which prevents him from carrying out the attack, and because he is afraid of death, which inevitably prevents him from giving his life. In portraying Ahmad as such, Updike attempts to portray terrorists as intensely dedicated fanatics, and prove that only true jihadists are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. This argument will be supplemented by a series of scholarly works by political science analysts on the psychological nature of terrorists and terrorist organizations.

**A Snail on Razor's Edge:
A Study of the Absurd in *Apocalypse Now***

“War is hell.” This phrase, first uttered by General William Tecumseh Sherman, quantifies the experience of war in just three words. In war, everything is skewed, everything is questioned. Morality, politics, yourself and life in general - they are all subject to scrutiny. Life itself becomes absurd. This relationship between the absurd and war is clearly evident in Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*. Based on the novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, the film tracks Captain Willard as he traverses the Nung River into Cambodia to find the renegade officer Colonel Kurtz, a journey in which he slowly transforms from the officer he once was into something much different. The film, in conjunction with the writings of Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, work to reveal the direct correlation between the absurd and being in war. In the film, war is seen as an act of suicide and because of this, it breeds meaninglessness in people, and perpetuates absurdity. In the words of Marlon Brando, “The horror, the horror.”

Kayla Weisdorf

Absolut Gender?

Two of the most common criticisms in academia seem to be “too general” and “too specific.” Considering how important finding a balance between the specific and the broad is in the intellectual world, it seems strange how little we consider such a question when using language in everyday life. “Trauma” and “gender” are words we often use in a cursory manner without even thinking about the great generalizations they make or how contestable the terms themselves are. Comparing Sarah Kane’s 4.48 *Psychosis* with David Markson’s *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* shows just how wrong making the assumptions implicit in the words trauma and gender are; the different situations of each text’s main character results in incredibly different reactions, fixations, and attitudes with respect to the body as truth and sex in the face of their traumas.

Identity Crisis

Wednesday, April 11
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Room B

Renee Barton

Women: Little Toys for Grown-Up Boys

“Woman in a strapless dress dancing a slow, grinding rumba, staring at Cesar Castillo. Old woman with hair coiffed upward in a heavenly spiral, staring at Cesar. Teenage girl[...] staring at Cesar...”

In his novel *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, Hijuelos’ female characters possess little more depth than wind-up dolls. Existent only as sexual playthings or objects desperate for the virile powers of Cesar or his brother, they are used by these men as a delusional means of escaping their own mortality. Even as Cesar lays dying, his final thoughts are not on the legacy he leaves behind him, but of the women he used to feel alive.

Lia Burton

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: How the Breedlove Family Projects Self-Perception onto Society in *The Bluest Eye*

This paper explores the self-perceptions of the Breedlove family in Toni Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and how these perceptions affect the way society views and treats them. The evidence in this paper comes from a comparison of the Breedloves and the MacTeer family. Though both families are similar in that they share the same race and similar financial situations, they differ in how they perceive themselves and how they project themselves to society, which therefore affects how society treats them. The Breedloves “wear” their ugliness and refuse to think highly of themselves, resulting in a society that also refuses to think highly of them. The MacTeers, however, represent a family who refuses to give in to the lie that they are ugly and they maintain both their self-esteem and their dignity, which thus causes society to treat them with more respect. While much has been said about society projecting racist views on minorities, this paper explores how the minorities themselves can project racist views on themselves and reinforce societal discrimination. This is not to say that African-Americans are in any way responsible for society’s racial discrimination, which dates back to slavery. Rather, this paper argues that the black community has the power to accept or reject racist societal views of themselves and can therefore have some influence over how society views them.

Elizabeth Thorne

The Road to Self-Destruction

Americans have a distinct discourse on sexuality and on other aspects of life such as drugs, alcohol, and proper lifestyles. Many individuals can’t handle the pressure of this discourse and so they go to “find themselves” in Europe or in universities. David in *Giovanni’s Room* travels to Europe to escape the pressures of his father and the students at Camden in *The Rules of Attraction* try to rebel through drugs, alcohol, and promiscuous sex. However, these methods of escape do not serve to alleviate the pressures of American society; David and the students at Camden ultimately wear themselves down by attempting to either fulfill or rebel against those pressures. Ultimately, the American discourse of desire pushes the characters on a path of self-destruction in their attempt to find themselves, since they will either be internally conflicted by the discourse or continue to rebel against it until they no longer can live.

Robin Yuan

Illusions in Love:

An Analysis of de Beauvoir's Depiction of the Existentialist Conflicts within Human Relationships

This paper will examine the representations of love and relationships in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Woman Destroyed* in light of Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas about human interaction, especially Sartre's discussion of the interactions and conflicts between the "for-itself" and "in-itself" within human relationships. I will draw primarily on de Beauvoir's depictions of love and the changing dynamics within the relationships of the main characters from *The Age of Discretion* and *The Woman Destroyed*, especially the ways in which the protagonists' sense of identity is formed in part as their role within a couple, and how it is affected by those around them when their perceptions clash with reality. Key points of the stories that I will discuss include instances where the narrator of *The Age of Discretion* finds major discrepancies between her husband's and son's behaviors and her expectations, as well as the ways that Noellie's intrusion into the relationship between Monique and Maurice forces Monique to abandon her illusions of being the perfect mother and wife.

Jenny Zha

The Secret Desirability of a Perverse Humanity

Beneath a humanistic façade of individualism and liberty, societies in general have always been marked by a struggle of interests between the individuals' passion and the government's mechanistic status quo. In this paper, I argue that a society, easily fallen into passive and orderly conformity, needs to keep the perverse "irrationality" that defines us as humans. Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and J. G. Ballard's *Crash* present their automated societies running like gears in a factory. However, in the hidden alleyway behind the factory lies a perverse truth of humanity. The stories of Alex and Vaughn vouch that, fortunately, the primitive root of our being cannot and should not be taken away. Those characteristics, in a sense, constitute our humanity - our Mortal Coil. Sadly, the mechanistic societies in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Crash* impose an automaton law-abiding citizen ideal on the protagonists. Contrary to popular perception, the characteristic efficiency of these more "advanced" cultures is not necessarily beneficial to humankind, since it oppresses our perverse yet unique obscurities. My paper aims to expose the underlying hypocrisy of the government's attempts to restrict our human qualities while guaranteeing us a "humane" life. At the same time, our persistent humanity should continue to resist this threat.

Prospective Perspective

Wednesday, April 11

5:00 – 6:15 p.m.

Banquet Room

Ed Bullard

Truth, Justice, and the American Disarray

In *Little Murders*, the protagonist, Alfred, like Camus' Meursault from *The Stranger*, wanders through life neither reflecting nor caring about his actions or feelings. He avoids any sort of confrontation by habitually backing down. In this way, both characters attempt to flee the absurdity of existence through indifference and apathy. This world view acts in almost the same way as Camus' understanding of suicide; they are unwilling to confront the Absurd, merely tolerating it as opposed to the open revolt Camus recommends. However, both men evolve throughout their respective stories due to their confrontations. Yet while Meursault becomes a true Absurd hero before his execution, Alfred adopts the optimistic outlook of his family and begins to participate in the random, senseless violence sweeping the city. This project will analyze Jules Feiffer's black comedy through the lens of Camus' Absurdist thought. It will seek to prove that Western ideals and values are meaningless in an absurd world.

Ivy Chang

The Inhuman Human: Exposing the "Supreme Reality" of Lee Miller's War Photography

According to André Breton's "Manifesto of Surrealism," too many individuals filter their perception of the world through the "sentinels of common sense" and eschew truth that may "be termed superstition, or fancy." Surrealist images, Breton urges, can counter this "absolute rationalism" by conveying a "supreme reality" that transcends any premeditated creation; the unrehearsed spontaneity required to create these images allows them to reveal the "supreme reality" of the human experience. A photograph from World War II, taken by model-turned-war correspondent Lee Miller, demonstrates these tenets of Surrealism through its inadvertent blurriness, candid accompanying text, and dreamlike juxtaposition of human and monster. The photograph's eerie subject, an injured soldier wrapped entirely in gauze, transcends the highbrow aspects of Bretonian Surrealism to forge an overarching connection between the raw mortality of World War II and the stylized gloss of British *Vogue*, where it was published. Miller's somatic mimicry of this "bad burns case" results in a unique, permanent infusion of her sensibilities into the photograph. This inextricable relationship between photographer and photographed preserves the aura of the image even after its mass publication, despite Walter Benjamin's claim that the mechanical reproduction of an image destroys its aura. As a result, Miller's aura, transmitted intact across the pages of *Vogue*, personally engages its viewers in the "supreme reality" of such distant human existence; this image thus transforms Surrealism from an abstruse artistic movement to a means of ensnaring into one mortal coil people existing in very different realities.

Marlo Gawey

Burn This Book

We exist in a world of data: discreet bits of information that our fallible human brains interpret and record to produce the world in which we live. Without our brains to perform the task of recording, rewriting, and connecting this information, it would be meaningless and our world would turn to randomness. Consequently, it becomes the uniquely human task to prevent chaos and maintain order in the form of history. History, furthermore, demands to be embodied in the form of text and texts demand to be printed onto pages. Pages are organized into books, which are stored in libraries which are sorted by genre, and the list goes on. All for the sake of organizing data. In David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, this task becomes an

all-consuming compulsion for the main character, who calls herself “curator of the world.” Simultaneously incinerating books and writing her own, she questions the relationship of the raw data to its material expression and the validity of her personal memory as the producer of history. This paper will discuss these relationships between memory and history and the transfer of data from random information to an embodied form.

Xiaolin Gong

All for One but not One for All

The struggle between nation and individual lies at the center of much post-independence Indian English literature. This essay discusses the unattainable permanence of communities in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, which is demonstrated by the disintegration of India’s national identity along with the fragmentation of the narrator’s conflicting identities. The narrator, Saleem Sinai, abandons physical communities through the creation of an imaginative, literary community in his narration. However, while some critics, such as John Su, interpret Saleem’s personal failure in establishing a unifying national identity as a positive ending that condemns homogeneity and leaves a hopeful future, my essay analyzes how the lack of an answer to what Josna Rege calls “unity in diversity” makes the ending of the novel a despondent conclusion.

Alexander Shams

Terrorism as a Form of Compassion in Modern Literature

In the wake of 9/11, a rash of fictional literature has emerged in the United States devoted to the subject of terrorism, in particular suicide bombing, and the motivations and mindsets of individuals involved in this type of activity. Because most of this literature’s audience is Western, writers such as John Updike, whose work *Terrorist* serves as a primary source in my research, often have a difficult time explaining foreign and abstract ideas such as martyrdom, sacrifice, and freedom. Author Terry Eagleton, whose book *Holy Terror* serves as a secondary source in my research, argues that these tenets are fundamental to the issue of the psychology of terrorism and are vital to any understanding of the topic. I will thus first attempt to demonstrate how Updike incorporates many of Eagleton’s ideas on terrorism into his work. I will then argue that, in order to make the reader understand the psychology of the terrorist, Updike employs the reader’s sense of compassion, making the work accessible to the reader.

Stuck in the Middle with You

Wednesday, April 11

5:00 – 6:15 p.m.

Pub

Amanda Georges

Androgyny and Glitter: Exploring Gender Essence in Glam Rock

The one characteristic any kindergartner can distinguish in a group of people is who is a boy and who is a girl. Gender identification is a standard practice and the male and female distinction is accepted as a natural divide among humans. However, Transexuality, androgyny, and hermaphroditism defy what is by and large considered normal sexual identification. These instances of defiance challenge the “naturalness” of gender. Using the gender theories of Judith Butler in her work *Undoing Gender*, I exam the artistic movement of glam rock’s open rebellion against gender definition, particularly as represented in Todd Haynes’ film *Velvet Goldmine* about the rise and fall of fictional androgynous rock star Brian Slade. I observe the commentary glam rock made on androgyny and gender mixing and how this supports Judith Butler’s philosophy. Finally, I look at the lasting effects glam rock has had on the world’s perception of gender.

Jessica Grubman

Sticking to that Balanced Diet: Finding a Healthy Blend of Cultures in America’s Proverbial Melting Pot

“Every day, the vegetables fall prey to Mrs. Sen’s scythe-like blade: cabbages, broccoli, potatoes and squash decimated, then stewed. Mrs. Das purchases puffed rice from a street vendor in India but doesn’t share with her family. A pot of Twinkle’s homemade fish stew continues to simmer atop a trivet adorned with Jesus’ face.”

The Indian American women of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Pulitzer Prize-winning short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* just can’t get away from food. Prison to some, refuge to others, cooking and food shape the lives and characters of these cross-cultural women. Indeed, Lahiri uses food metaphorically in her exploration of cross-cultural women. The meals the women prepare, or don’t, as the case may be, are symbolic of the extent to which they conform to traditional gender roles and successfully blend Indian and American cultures.

Pamela Mizuno

Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*: Parental Confusion in the Personal Development of the Hybrid Adolescent

In Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha is a young girl growing up in both Shona and Western cultures. After being raised in England, Nyasha returns home to colonial Rhodesia but struggles to cope with her cultural hybridity, striving to balance tradition with modernity. She is the daughter of Babamukuru and Maiguru, who push for her assimilation into the Western world, but condemn her for abandoning her heritage. The pressures to assimilate to the new culture, yet remember the old, results in a particularly frustrating family situation. This paper argues that for Nyasha, the difficulty in establishing her personal identity comes not from the social and political changes of the two cultures, but from the confusing and misleading values of the parents.

Elizabeth Scott

**Suffering for Godot:
Mourning and Melancholia in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot***

“Let's go.' *They do not move.*” This is the famous ending to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, a play in two repetitive and cyclical acts that exhibits little movement, both physically and mentally. The stasis of the characters Estragon and Vladimir in this work mirrors the immobility of a victim continuously plagued by past trauma. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Sigmund Freud draws a distinction between possible responses to post-traumatic experiences. He explains that mourning and melancholia are the two ways to cope with pain after a traumatic event, mourning being the more traditional and healthy way to cope and melancholia relating more to complete stasis and projected self-loathing (possibly even self-destruction). Estragon and Vladimir are trapped in between these two alternatives. I will examine what Beckett's work means as a whole for trauma and focus on how the characters contradict Freud's perspectives on melancholia and mourning. I will explain how the grieving process functions for Estragon and Vladimir and delve into their struggle to exist in the space between mourning and melancholia.

Kristie Wang

**Forever in Transit:
The Concept of Home in *The Namesake***

In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri portrays the nostalgia of immigrant life in the experience of the Ganguli family from India. The parents, Ashoke and Ashima, and the children, Gogol and Sonia, find it difficult to identify with a concrete concept of home. Ashoke and Ashima, after having left their native land of India, endeavor to form a sense of home in America. There grows a painful but unavoidable dichotomy of distance and familiarity with both the new country and the native land, neither of which is entirely foreign or entirely home. Gogol, as a first generation American, also experiences difficulty compromising between his childhood full of his parents' traditions and his own existence in American society. The uprooting of the concept of home in both the parents and the children results in a perpetual state of hovering - an irresolution of racial identity caught up between nostalgia for the past home and assimilation to the present home. My paper further argues that a comfort and ease in this uncertainty ultimately develops, making this hovering home in itself. Such an ambivalent state of existence, the abandonment of the permanency of home, and the distress that nostalgia for an irrecoverable world creates, give way to a new home and community.

Tammy Zhu

Who are the Normals?

What does it mean to be “normal” in today's society? Being normal (unfortunately) means surrendering to the pressures exerted by society, giving up one's identity, individuality, passion, and pleasure. But at one point in my life, I thought our society promoted individualism. Perhaps it does. But at the same time, our society emits pressure molecules that hold us in, that prevent us from being who we are, that force us to change. For instance, college admissions officers and employers search for those who “stand out.” Yet once they accept a student or employee, the concept of “standing out” disintegrates into ashes. Organizations initiate a process of conformity or “socialization,” in which they do everything they can to homogenize the group and eliminate any differences between one individual and another. And in this process lies a great contradiction: while our society prides itself on its esteem of the individual, it drives that very quality underground and into hiding. So then how do we, as individuals, students, employees, and perhaps victims, navigate the perilous waters of this dialectic? In my paper, I will examine the comedy film *In & Out*, in which this contradiction is explored. I will also attempt to engage in a conversation with the essays of Leslie Fiedler and Michel Foucault.

The End of the World as We Know It

Tuesday, April 11
5:00 – 6:15 p.m.
Room C

Jeffrey Cui

Our Fragile Friendship with Machines

Humans are ambivalent towards technology; they invent new technologies they can rely on for daily conveniences, but remain troubled by the fearful implications this reliance brings forth. Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey* describes how the invention of the railroad in the nineteenth century elicited much excitement by allowing people to travel with unprecedented ease, but also lead people to worry about accidents and injuries they could not prevent. *I, Robot* similarly explores this attitude by fabricating a future society that mistrusts the robots it depends on for its daily needs. In this paper, I will argue that even though we invent technology to ease our lives and to develop our societies, we simultaneously mistrust them because we are afraid that they can go out of control, bringing forth severe repercussions we can do little about. This fear of technology can prevent society from fulfilling its potential for development. Thus, people need to accept their technologies by realizing that these inventions are a force they can control to their advantage, so that they can better enjoy the promises these inventions can deliver.

Preeya Prakash

The “M”-asculated Butterfly

For years, man has searched for the “Perfect Woman.” She should be obedient, graceful, and fulfill his needs in every way. For Rene Gallimard, Song Liling is his perfect woman - except, she is actually a man, working for the Communist Party of Vietnam. However, Gallimard is more upset to find his power over a subservient, Eastern woman has been taken away. His ideal of the East bowing to the all-powerful West is destroyed. As supported by Karen Shimakawa and her article, “Who’s to Say?,” the bane of existence for men is absolute power over women and when that power ebbs away, they have no motivation to continue on. Their mortal coil is the absence of power in their lives.

Thomas Schaeffer Nelson

Theology of a Corpse: Death and Prophecy in *The Violent Bear it Away*

Southern novelist and devout Catholic Flannery O’Conner was a firm believer that the human spiritual experience and the physical body are thoroughly bonded, with each impacting the other. Thus, the climactic end of a human body, death, is laden with spiritual significance, particularly in O’Conner’s novel, *The Violent Bear it Away*. In a novel preoccupied with prophets, O’Conner’s descriptions of death are especially key to her understanding of prophecy. It is in the story’s death scenes that such theological concerns climax and are most vividly on display. The novel also invokes the prophets of the Bible as ancestors of the fictional prophets and this invocation is heightened in the deaths. By examining the novel’s deaths in light of literary criticism and Biblical texts, O’Conner’s convictions about prophecy and its relationship to the body can be seen with greater precision and clarity.

Jennifer Sheu

**A Fecal City Rises:
Materialism, Money, and Consumption in Invisible Cities and Beyond**

This essay discusses how *Invisible Cities* can be regarded as Italo Calvino's attempt to use descriptions of imagined cities as social commentary in which he presents his views on our ever-increasing consumption and the resulting impacts thereof on communities. According to Kathryn Hume, Calvino's cities contain signs of, "sensual desire," which, in today's world, is often seen in conjunction with the consumption of goods. Often, advertisements link brand name goods with sensuality in order to convince consumers to purchase the item being advertised and we find this phenomenon constantly occurring around the world. As much of the research on Calvino focuses mainly on form and technique and not so much on this particular focus, this essay will provide an alternate viewpoint on both Calvino's writings and the world today.

Casey Williamson

**Facing Loneliness:
Intersections Between Science and Existentialism**

Medical and academic standards often seem to characterize the experience of loneliness as an abnormal, pathological condition that can be "cured" or somehow "worked through," and this often involves prescription drugs and somewhat impersonal treatment. Playwright Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* represents a fractured woman's struggle with loneliness as physical, pathological anguish as well as agony in the philosophical sense - pain arising from the impermanence of all things and the pressing reality of human mortality. I will argue that this loneliness can be illuminating as well as destructive. My paper examines scientific research and incorporates accepted psychological interpretations of loneliness with an existentialist perspective that acknowledges loneliness as an essential, shared part of what makes us human and potentially a source for personal growth as it thrusts upon us the responsibility for finding meaning in our own lives.

Lulu Zheng

Death by Love

Love can be painful. It is uncertain, consuming, and ruthless. But most people would choose love over loss. In fact, some people attempt suicide at the mere possibility of separation. To prove this, I will use Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* and back it with excerpts from Plato's *Symposium* as secondary support. My paper delves into why certain relationships end in death, and I argue that those love affairs come to their bloody conclusions because the lovers essentially become one unit. In these relationships, love is so strong that it morphs the identities of its participants and they become extensions of one another. Thus, without the other, they are unable to emotionally survive.

I Choose therefore I am

Wednesday, April 11

7:15 – 8:30 p.m.

Room A

Brittany Breed

A Perfect World: An Exploration of a World Void of Disability

Disabilities are often considered abnormalities, transgressions of the normal, and, too often, mistakes. In *Rethinking Life or Death*, Peter Singer argues for the legalization of killing babies with disabilities. He also argues that it should be lawful for parents to kill, at any age, individuals with severe cognitive impairments as to him they are not really “persons.” Is it simply convenient for these types of people to simply not exist? But what is a “person”? Is the criterion self-awareness? Is the narrator of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, Christopher, any less of a human than you and I? Does he deserve the right to live even though he’s autistic?

Chandler Ford

A Life Without Love: Emotional Suicide

In my paper I propose that choosing life is synonymous with choosing love. Through the disfigured lens of Michel Gondry, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* presents love as a savior. Two lovers, each bent on suicidal love affairs, find one another again in the truthful and fragmented psyche of Joel’s memories. Rather than commit their love to death, Joel’s sudden impulse to save his love spurs him to rescue his and Clementine’s relationship, to choose a life of love. Together, Joel and Clementine must hide deep inside Joel’s memories, running from the mind-erasing Lacuna Inc. crew, to save their love. I argue that suicidal desire is removed and replaced with a will to love. The scientific analysis of love and choice explores the principles of life, love and suicide.

Tracy Hruby

Denmark is a Comfortable Prison: Freedom, Captivity, Decisions and Hesitations in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Would you rather live in a comforting prison or terrifying freedom? For this conference, I will use Sartre’s concept that “existence precedes essence” to discuss the implications of freedom and choice in Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Existentialism speaks of “a kind of personal freedom that is inviolable regardless of circumstances.” According to Sartre’s approach, the freedom of man depends on attitude, not situation. Even Hamlet agrees that “there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.” And while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the two main characters in this Hamlet-turned-on-it’s-head, would like to be free, while they frequently lament being caught up in events beyond their scope, ultimately they choose their cage by choosing to accept it. The pair chooses not to define themselves by their actions or choices. This is defining. We know the characters’ fates from the outset. We know their actions will be constrained to the major plot points of *Hamlet*, one of the best known stories of all time. So we watch them halfheartedly try to squirm out of the path of their impending doom. The “divinity that shapes our ends” that Hamlet finds so reassuring is terribly unsettling to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as they are not at all certain divinity is shaping ends in their favor. However, in the end the reason the pair has no freedom, is because they don’t choose to have any. They choose to live in the comfortable prison, which is the real reason Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.

Steven Light

**You Are Whoever I Think You Are:
Patriarchal Definitions of Female Sexuality in Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber"**

Just imagine the conflict that arises when the meaning of sex as inherently constructive is subverted and becomes destructive. Angela Carter's short story, "The Bloody Chamber," addresses the idea of death as sexual. Here the reader sees the Narrator face her new husband the Marquis, an extreme sadist that intends to murder her to add to his "harem" of corpses in his dungeon. I intend to argue that Carter writes the story as a condemnation of ignorance of the patriarchal perversion of sexuality. The Narrator becomes quite aware of herself a sexual being, proven by her reactions upon discovering an extensive collection of de Sade within her husband's library. More importantly, this reveals that her introduction into sexuality is based entirely upon her relationship with a man. Because of this the Marquis can manipulate the Narrator's sexual knowledge, preventing her from understanding the patriarchal subversion of sex presented in its most extreme form. So Carter does not punish the Narrator for her sexuality as some anti-erotic feminism may claim. She actually is supporting the sexual liberation of women.

Helen Moser

**Religious *Quicksand*:
The Suffocating Effects of Faith Without Reason**

In Nella Larsen's 1928 novel *Quicksand*, lead character Helga Crane is "lost – or saved" after stumbling into a Harlem church on a rainy night (Larsen 114). With her newfound faith, Helga believes she will finally find the happiness and inner resolution for which she has been searching. However, after moving to a small Alabama community and enduring hardship and sickness, Helga renounces religion and the existence of God. But is her critique fair? Are Helga's experiences with religion in the novel logically indicative of the absence of a higher power? Using critical analyses of *Quicksand* and referencing the alternative image of God presented in Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, this paper addresses the problems with Helga's claim. In limiting her view of God to a very narrow scope and eliminating all practice of her own reason, Helga makes herself an unfit guide into the murky waters of faith. Thus, Helga discredits her own profession of atheism, which is nothing more than further evidence of her self-delusion.

Me, Myself, and I

Wednesday, April 11

7:15 – 8:30 p.m.

Room B

Valerie Chen

Using Drugs to Experience Withdrawal from Society: an Existential Simulation of Freedom

Most people do not question societal traditions such as the compulsion to work or the desire to accumulate possessions and nurture good health. Others find only disillusionment in the typical human pursuits and seek their own ways of life. Psychologist and neurologist Viktor Frankl's philosophy of logotherapy is based in existential psychotherapy, exploring how people exercise their freedom in order to confront the feelings of aloneness and meaninglessness that are an inevitable part of the human experience. The band of social misfits in Irvine Welsh's novel, *Trainspotting*, turns to heroin use as a means of escaping the consumerism and materialism that overwhelm contemporary existence. Frankl would have disapproved of the characters' immersion in drug subculture, as he eschewed hedonism as a barrier to effectively creating meaning in life. However, withdrawal from society through drug addiction is in the existentialist tradition because it allows people to abdicate social obligation and pushes the definition of human freedom to the point of the right to self-destruction.

Kerrina Coffey

The Self-Preservation Instinct

My presentation considers the topic of the human self-preservation instinct. How does this strong instinct come to direct people's actions? What forces are necessary to usurp its influence? And what happens when a person seems to be missing this instinct? By examining the characters of Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, I will explore the impact of this powerful force.

Jessica Erberich

"All I Hear is Movies"

Giuseppe Tornato's film *Cinema Paradiso* deals with the dichotomy between idealism and pragmatics. It explores the separation and overlap between the technical aspects of film and the cultural fantasies it engages in. This difference is reflected on a deeper level in the life choices of the protagonist, Salvatore de Vita. He has become both wealthy and well-known as a film director, but as we relive his past with him, we come to wonder whether he would have been better off if he had failed to live up to his full potential but been able to remain with the love of his life. But it was decided for him that he should give up personal romance for the sake of artistic achievement. *Cinema Paradiso* highlights the cultural conflict between alternate definitions of success; between money and happiness, between ambition and idealism, between the future's expectations and the moment's fantasy.

Andy Katz-Moses

**Selfishness and Symbiosis:
The Death of Romantic Love as We Know it?**

Sigmund Freud claims that men's love for women is rooted in the desire to possess his "sexual object," whereas "the female, who does not want to be separated from her helpless young, is obliged, in their interests, to remain with the stronger male." Pretty romantic huh? In *Giovanni's Room*, David searches blindly for a woman to have sex with in order to affirm his non-existent heterosexuality. In *Closer*, Alice doesn't even give her lover of three years a real name; which she willfully gives out to patrons at a strip club. Even Larry compares his undying love for Anna to a dog loving its master. The beauty and nature of love is the question and selfishness and symbiosis is the answer. We need to love and be loved. Biology may say a chemical reaction is really the thing we call love - it is not any less real. Through the primary works of *Giovanni's Room* and *Closer* along with psychological and biological commentary, I will explore how deep love's beauty really is.

Kristin Oketani

**Living in the Shadows:
Israel, the Holocaust, and the Struggle to Create Identity**

"Most of us view the Holocaust from a historical perspective. It was an event in time. But we must understand that for the survivors of any trauma, the event is an ongoing one, with ongoing consequences." This quote, by professor of psychology Aaron Hass, exemplifies the Israel that Roth portrays in his book, *The Counterlife*. The characters he creates are all attempting to construct their own existence apart from the past, yet it is something that permeates all aspects of their lives. I will argue that the fanaticism that Roth portrays is the result of the trauma of the Holocaust and the struggle to create identity in its wake. I will be using literature focusing on the aftermath of the Holocaust and how individuals and societies deal with grief to help support my thesis.

“Passing” Notions

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Banquet Room

Nancy Chen

Surviving the Unsurvivable: *Lost* in America after 9/11

After September 11, Americans were in need of something that would guide them through a world that no longer made sense. It was no coincidence that three years later, ABC Television spent more money on a show's pilot episode than any company had ever before. ABC gambled well; almost 20 million viewers tuned into *Lost*'s series premiere in 2004. *Lost* clearly gave Americans what they wanted at the time they wanted it: regular citizens from all walks of life surviving a disaster that had displaced them both physically and emotionally. The survivors had no other choice but to go on with their lives in the same manner Americans were forced to after September 11. In its first season, the characters of *Lost* are forcibly transported to a magical place with a mysterious hatch, a secret bunker and a tropical polar bear. From an airplane exploding to a passenger giving birth, each character, each storyline can be interpreted as having symbolic roots in September 11. The leader of the forty-four survivors was not an extraordinarily muscular government agent but instead a level-headed doctor. Would *Lost* have been as successful if it was made before September 11? What about *Lost* satiates the hunger that Americans have for safety and security after a tragedy?

MacKenzie Smith

Mind vs. Body: An Exploration of Sexual Mentality in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

Literary critics hasty to define Lawrence's characters in terms of Oedipal theory fail to address the evidential support for alternative explanations suggesting that the sons' hostility toward their father and affection for their mother is not a result of repressed Oedipal inclinations. The primary son in the novel, however, does suffer from the Madonna/Whore complex, in which women are divided into two categories: Madonnas, who are worthy of love but above sex; and whores, who deserve only sex. In the past, this complex has been attributed to a distant mother-son relationship. *Sons and Lovers*, however, reveals how a close relationship between mother and son, particularly when combined with a distant mother-father relationship, can have the same effect. Children, particularly boys, have a natural tendency to idealize their mothers. Destruction of this ideal with the onset of reality is typical as children grow up and realize that their parents are flesh-and-blood humans. Although this realization can be unpleasant and sometimes trauma-inducing, I argue that it is a necessary step in human sexual development. Because Paul Morel, the primary son in *Sons and Lovers*, lacks the opportunity to confront the reality of his mother's physicality, he is unable to dispel his illusion that his mother is *only* a mother and is thus prevented from integrating the two aspects of womanhood - what Freud refers to as "affection" and "sensuality" - into the same woman forever after.

Stephanie Spoleti

How Death Migrates: An Analysis of Mortality in Cocteau and Buñuel

Jean Cocteau and Luis Buñuel were two of the most influential Surrealist filmmakers. However, their unconventional cinematic method often clouded their messages about death in their films, which often go unnoticed by the viewer, particularly in the modern day. If we consider the time period in which their respective films were made as well as the religious background of Cocteau and Buñuel, their visions of death and "this mortal coil" reveal themselves within the obscure, unusual imagery inherent in Surrealist filmmaking. Through the analysis of stylistic device, character role, and narrative, my paper will present

each filmmaker's interpretation of death: Cocteau's vision of death as inspiration, and Buñuel's vision of death as a betrayal to the living. The films used as representatives of each director's canon will be Cocteau's *Orphee* and Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. In the former, the main characters will be analyzed in relation to each other, displaying how Orpheus's encounter with death leads to a resurgence in his poetry. In Buñuel's work, research will focus more on his use of religious iconography and its inherent insinuations. Finally, the analysis of these films will reveal how European and American society's view of death has changed from the homogenous classicist era to the heterogeneous postmodernist era.

Ashley Sutton

Defining of the Mortal Coil and its Supposed Superiority

A single, optimal definition of the mortal coil is hard to find since the definition depends on what one wishes to distinguish humans from. For example, language capabilities separate humans from animals, but *I, Robot* demonstrates that robots are also able to communicate. Emotion is then used to divide humans from robots, but *Blade Runner* shows how this definition is also problematic. In *A Clockwork Orange* society defines the mortal coil or being human as following the laws that society creates. Yet, this definition is also proven to be inaccurate in *I, Robot* and *Blade Runner*. Can a definition of the mortal coil actually be found or are multiple definitions necessary for different situations? To answer this question one must first realize why it is even necessary to find a definition of the mortal. Humans find need a definition in order to distinguish ourselves from all other things so that we can maintain our feeling of superiority. However, the superiority of what is defined as human is questioned in both of the texts and the movie. The final question is, then, is the search for a definition of the mortal coil, and thus for superiority, actually necessary or useful?

Kevin Webb

Is Art Immortality?

What happens when people die? Their work, their art, remains. And what is Art except an attempt to communicate? Thus, if Shakespeare can cheat death by his works remaining, and the painting of Picasso preserves him, then what happens to these immortal figures not if their work is forgotten, but remembered wrong? In *Wittgenstein's Mistress* by David Markson, we will be looking at Kate who is, or thinks herself to be, the last person on Earth. So, she turns to Art: to observe and create. But, as Art becomes mutilated in her writings, does she not mutilate others?

Reality Bites

Wednesday, April 11
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Pub

Amanda Fildes

Masquerade: The Impossibility of Self-Evasion

My paper argues that the escape of self is impossible. Through the exploration of Mike Nichols' *Closer* and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, I delve into the ways in which characters attempt to escape their true selves by beginning a "new life" in a physical location far from home. The attempt to escape through masquerade serves as an intriguing entryway into character analysis of David and Alice. In this paper, I discuss the impossibility of success in these characters actions as they discover that these "new lives" are the same as those with which they began.

Elliot Lee

Recording the Past: The Mechanization of Memory

What is the relationship between memory and technology? This essay discusses the ways in which Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* utilize unreliable narrators to demonstrate the mechanization of memory. Their flawed memories composed of a jumble of thoughts are a striking contrast to modern analog and digital recordings. As personal media rapidly becomes more computerized and capable, the past can be archived in pristine digital format for generations to come. Yet despite the apparent obsolescence of memory, it alone is able to capture the emotion of tragedy, war, achievement, and success. And the past is frequently twisted, as when Mahatma Gandhi was reinvented to advertise the Macintosh computer - which Rushdie condemned. Though pictures and videos assure that nothing will be lost, there is no guarantee that meaning will remain the same; it will change, depending on how it's projected into the present.

Evangeline Lu

Flourishing Pasts, Floundering Futures

I delve into the phenomenon of memory in Oscar Hijuelos's *Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, arguing that the past is not only repeated in the mind, but that it is also moldable, thusly serving as both a constraint and a source for escape, dictating characters' actions and emotions. Using post-modern narrative theory and articles including Amy Elias' "Oscar Hijuelos' *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, and Robert Coover's *The Public Burning*" as foundations, I explore the degree to which the fluidity of recollection affects and distorts the perspectives of Cesar and Nestor Castillo, brothers both haunted by their pasts. We are mortal; we only have one life to live. However, we also have the power to expand and reconstruct this life; we can reinvent reality through recollection.

Mandi Paszek

**The Paper Shield:
Storytelling as a Defense Against Mortality in *The Hours***

From the writing of a novel to the sharing of everyday activities, storytelling plays an indispensable role in how humans define themselves in relation to others and to their world. The movie *The Hours* explores the impact of story on the individual by interweaving the lives of three women from different decades, drawing parallels between each one's struggle to accept their own mortality and the feelings of triviality and confinement they suffer within it. Additionally, the film bears a theme of society's tendency to value the story over the actual individual, which drives the characters to seek escape from their realities through story, preferring its aura of possibility and immortality to the imperfection and limitation of human interaction. This paper will use the narrative of *The Hours* and psychological analyses of suicide and traumatic response to show how the false use of story as a defense against living cannot result in absolution, but only in devaluing oneself until the only solution seems to be one's own destruction.

Allison Walsh

Illusions of Purpose Created Through Night

In *Up All Night*, Martha Gies depicts the voices of individual night workers through a series of vignettes. From strippers to zookeepers and longshoremen, the details of the nightlife of each character are laid bare, and one thing that each worker has in common is a susceptibility to be caught in some form of deadly occupational routine. Workers in corporate America have been known to be discontent with the idea that the routines performed for their occupations are dull, and meaningless, and thus there have been movements to bring spirituality or meaning to the workplace. For the nocturnal characters in *Up All Night*, who may be similarly discontent with the routine nature of their work, nighttime rather than (and occasionally in conjunction with) spirituality provides them with illusions of freedom. Through the inherent differences between night and day, the characters each create their own illusion of purpose to counter the projection of their lives as meaningless spirals towards death.

Ben Yip

eXistenZ in *The Matrix*:
The Cinema's Fascination with False Reality

David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* and the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* question both its characters' and its audience's perceptions of reality. Their protagonists want to "shuffle off this mortal coil" of virtual reality and find the real world. Yet, both Cronenberg and the Wachowskis illustrate these stories through cinema, which, as stated in Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," has "penetrated so deeply into reality" that it deceives our view of the real world. How antagonistic, then, are the fake and virtual worlds of *eXistenZ* and *The Matrix* when the films themselves are false portrayals of reality that have been staged for the screen? With this question in mind, the film protagonists' quest for a true reality is, perhaps, futile since moviegoers, in viewing these films, already have demonstrated their willingness to stay in the false world that technology has given them.

The Producers

Tuesday, April 11
7:15 – 8:30 p.m.
Room C

Bert Gay

Intelligent Design: A Contemplation of Creation

What drives us to create art? Why do humans feel the need to see an idea realized? I have attempted to answer this question by examining how some artists build a body of work in order to avoid their own mortality and pain, while others (not true artists) create simply for fame, money, glory, etc. In Oscar Hijuelo's *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*, Nestor and Cesar Castillo perfectly illustrate this dichotomy as well as provide a fascinating character study. With this and other texts I explore the ins and outs of creation as a means to immortality.

Mary Ann Jawili

“I’m [Home]sick As a Dog”: Nostalgia in *The Royal Tenenbaums*

When people long for “the good ol’ days,” it’s usually because something is amiss in the present. As Fred Davis explains, “What occasions us to feel nostalgia must also reside in the present.” But what if those ol’ days were not good? Can one reminisce fondly of a lackluster past? If so, what evokes this feeling, and what does one hope to achieve by remembering or reliving that past? *The Royal Tenenbaums*, directed by Wes Anderson, tells of Royal Tenenbaum’s attempt to rejoin his family with the alibi that he is dying of cancer. Neglectful of them in the past, Royal entices his grown children to visit in order “to set things right” with them. One cannot help but sympathize with this man who is so nostalgic for a past he wishes to improve that he must feign a terminal illness to gain the attention of those dear to him. Little does Royal know that he indeed has an illness: nostalgia. First defined, nostalgia was initially a medical term to describe that overwhelming—and sometimes fatal—desire to return home or homesickness. To Royal, home is his family. This paper examines why one might embrace memories of a less-than-ideal past and what happens when the components of that past are reunited.

Jasmine Knight

Embodying the Time: The Game of Seduction in *Cruel Intentions* and *Dangerous Liaisons*

Roger Kumble’s 1999 *Cruel Intentions* is a sexual explosion of teenage love and deceit. A large influence for this film is Choderlos De Laclos’ sexual 18th century epistolary novel, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and Stephen Frears’ 1988 adaptation *Dangerous Liaisons*, which is also set in the 18th century. Kumble applies his version to the 20th century, which may have fewer social taboos than the century than the 18th century. One could go so far to even say that Kumble made his film version “wilder” than *Dangerous Liaisons*, largely due to the fact that 20th century teens are wilder than their counterparts in the 18th century. Some of the situations that the characters find themselves in are the same in both the Frears and Kumble adaptations; the outcomes are what distinguish the differences between the two social cultures. Sometimes considered just a teenage remake of *Dangerous Liaisons* by some critics, *Cruel Intentions* proves itself to have a fresh perspective on Laclos’ novel with its 20th century twist on sexuality.

Amanda Springer

Terrorism is ubiquitous across the modern media spectrum, from factual reports to analysis to live video feeds. Anyone watching the news can see terrorism affects the media, but to what extent does the media influence terrorism? This essay examines John Updike's novel *Terrorist* and James McTeigue's feature film *V for Vendetta*, focusing on the protagonists' personal reflections and interactions with others through media, and scrutinizing government-media relations in response to terror. In these two works, the cycle of terrorism manifests itself as a multifaceted construction of media, fueled by a need for identity among the protagonists, Ahmad and V, accelerated by commercial media spectacle, and completed by governmental manipulation of population for its own ends. Ultimately, the protagonists' attempts to use media for their own ends actually work against them, allowing the governments they despise to further flex their political muscles.

Tam Tran

Perils of the Normal: The Perils of Perfection

With the progression of science, a new age of genetics is dawning with unlimited possibilities. As modifications of an individual's phenotype and genotype are becoming somewhat possible, we now strive and dream of pushing the limits of nature even further by our desire to create a world of "perfect individuals." Imagine a world where people can choose to eliminate physical deformities and genetic diseases, in order to meet their human potential. Though science continues to progress quickly, there is now the question of whether science has moved faster than our sense of ethical understanding of this progress. Vincent Freeman, in the movie *Gattaca*, is born naturally into a world where everyone has been genetically modified. He undergoes what Leslie Fiedler calls, "the tyranny of the Normal" as the normal—those who have not been genetically modified—become the abnormal in the future society. Vincent's narrative raises ethical questions about the negative role science can play in our lives.

