

# The Tower of Babel

Sixth Annual Undergraduate Research Conference

Thematic Option Honors Program

University of Southern California

April 9-10, 2003



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*And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."*

--Genesis 11: 1-9

*No one sleeps in this room without / the dream of a common language.*

--Adrienne Rich

*I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar.*

--Friedrich Nietzsche

Los Angeles, California

## Background and Purpose

The Thematic Option Honors Program, part of the USC College of Letters, Arts and 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 are invited to 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 "The Tower of Babel" 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 a Thematic Option writing instructor serving as the panel's chair and respondent. An opportunity for questions and answers ensues after presentation of papers on each panel.

## The Tower of Babel

The question of whether the Tower of Babel rose on the ancient Mesopotamian plain that is now modern Iraq does not lessen its cultural significance. Compelled by the yearning and curiosity it symbolizes, artists render the mythical Tower visible, indelible; archaeologists and theosophists investigate its traces; poets and politicians ply it as metaphor; and internet users adopt it as a model for the future. The dream of a common language underscores our fascination with the Tower, for it seems to promise community, understanding, and peace. The dream also elides difference, cries "English Only," and supports American hegemonic power and globalization. Evoking our nostalgia for the imaginary homeland, for home, the Tower speaks to a population of exiles and displaced others; it represents a spiritual fortress in an increasingly secular world. Like science, it stretches toward the heavens, a symbol of humankind's will-to-progress—both ordering and overreaching. A sign, after all, of desire and regulation, transgression and power, the Tower of Babel is both wish-fulfillment fantasy and gothic nightmare for an increasingly global community.

### Conference Coordinators:

Meghann Ahern	Caitlin Price
Ananda Jacobs	Tristan Stein
Suzanne Ogden	Laura Voisin George

Staff Liaison: Dan Walkup

# Schedule

## Wednesday, April 9

4:00 p.m.      Grace Ford Salvatori Hall, Room 106

Introduction by Jane Cody  
Associate Dean, Academic Programs  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences  
Keynote Address by A.J. Langguth  
Professor, School of Journalism  
USC Annenberg School for Communication

5:00 p.m.      Faculty Center

Buffet Dinner

6:30 p.m.      Faculty Center

Panel Presentations

Missundaztood: Society's Misrepresentations and Misinterpretations (Room A)  
Say, Say, Say: Lyrics, Language and Linguistics (Room B)  
Language as Time Machine (Pub)  
I'm Special, Just like Everyone Else: Assimilation and Difference (Banquet Room)

7:45 p.m.      Break

8:00 p.m.      Faculty Center

Panel Presentations

Crossing Boundaries: Cultural Communication (Room A)  
Space Invaders: Violating Physical and Mental Boundaries (Room B)  
Assimilating the Inappropriate, Building the Extreme (Pub)  
Get Fuzzy: Subjective Realities or Strains of Truth, Shades of Memory (Banquet Room)

Thursday, April 10

5:00 p.m. Faculty Center

Panel Presentations

You're Not Listening to Me: Gendered Stereotypes (Room A)

Life Making Art, Art Communicating Life (Room B)

That Old Black Magic: Consequences of Being Larger Than Life (Room C)

Bad Boys, Bad Boys, Whatcha Gonna Do? (Banquet Room)

6:15 p.m. Faculty Center

Buffet Dinner

7:30 p.m. Faculty Center

Panel Presentations

The Tower of Technology: Where Does It Lead? (Room A)

Speechless: Alternate Forms of Communication (Room B)

Madness, Mistrust and Memory: Fracturing the Mind (Room C)

Come Together: Breaking down the Need to Know (Banquet Room)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
6:30-7:45  
ROOM A

### Missundaztood: Society's Misrepresentations and Misinterpretations

Moderated by Jennifer Dobbs

Department of English

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Molly Mahar

#### UnReality: Silence and Misrepresentation in Media Photography

"A picture says a thousand words," while saying none at all—and herein lies the problem in photojournalism. Lacking a distinct language, photographs communicate mainly through symbols, which can be deciphered differently according to the context provided. Yet often the media provides inadequate background information for the images displayed, ignoring vital portions of the action surrounding the visual record. Even more frequently, photographs are cropped for impact and attention, with the result that one interpretation is encouraged over others. Using two famous photographs from the Vietnam War, *Children Fleeing a Napalm Strike* and *General Loan Executing a Vietnam Suspect*, I will investigate the manner in which misrepresentation exists in the visual media and how it affects those portrayed. Silence is not a negative quality in photography; on the contrary, it is the basis of its effectiveness—but is it misused?

Jenna Pedley

#### *Dogma*: In the Doghouse or Divine?

Vulgar, humorous, and holy? This paper explores the spiritual value of the 1999 film *Dogma*. Directed by Kevin Smith, the film addresses the issues of organized religion in a seemingly immoral and secular society. Despite massive controversy at its release, the film's unique satire of Catholicism seeks to bridge the gap between the religious theocracies of past civilizations and our own material society rather than blaspheme against God and religion. Thus, the film's true condemnation lies within its medium, not its message; contemporary religion and spirituality can be better portrayed through a popular and almost asinine film rather than the time honored ritual of the Church.

Brian Fox

#### The Embers of Symbols: Collective Unconscious in Regeneration

The theories of collective unconscious (Jung) and psychoanalysis (Freud), and the technique of stream of consciousness (William James) explore symbolic dream-levels of the psyche. Since primitive social, mythological, sexual and aesthetic patterns (as defined by anthropologists) appear in everyday life, some part of human existence and consciousness must be working to connect the details of everyday life with a web of symbols and "huge cloudy meanings behind the daily face of things," as Edith Wharton puts

it in *Ethan Frome*. The possibility of such symbolic archetypes is evidence for the desire and the "dream of a common language."

Eric Kalisher

### The War on Language: Censorship in Textbooks and Tests

Textbooks and tests play an important role in the school learning experience. These texts, however, restrict both language and subject matter in a way that inhibits the intellectual growth of children. Works of high literary quality are butchered and, quite often, any sense of relevance to the realities of the world is eliminated. The offending biases, which can simultaneously include Christian-Right principles and feminist ideology, create a world on paper that is fundamentally different from the one that surrounds students. These passive texts, with abortion, war, and gender distinctions conspicuously absent, falsely represent the complex, conflict-ridden reality. The result of this censorship is a seemingly irrelevant education system that is hindered by the very words that children read. Yet, can this censorship be stopped? Can we restore the integrity of school texts? For now, understanding the mechanisms at work is the best hope.

Erin Woods

### Controversy Masked by Hollywood: The Making of an American Hero

Hollywood plays a large role in determining our heroes. From leaders to athletes, film "biographies" tailor and convey a specific image for a specific individual. These false representations appear at a time that is convenient—many times when the subject cannot speak for himself. Focusing on the late president, John F. Kennedy, and the debilitated boxer, Muhammad Ali, I will investigate how film biographies have interpreted their lives arbitrarily and have constructed them as American Heroes: movie-made icons lacking crucial elements of their lives.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
6:30-7:45  
ROOM B

Say, Say, Say: Lyrics, Language and Linguistics

Moderated by Michael Miklos  
Department of English  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Choon-Kyu Lee

In Search of the Mother Tongue

Any serious attempt at historical linguistics should ultimately take into account the evolutionary history of the human species, as certain factors – e.g. isolation and migration, according to the geneticist Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza – necessarily govern language and biology in correlative manners. Although historical linguists have firmly established such language families as Indo-European, Dravidian, and Khoisan, they have largely avoided discussing more remote genetic relationships between languages. Joseph Greenberg and his followers, the main proponents of the so-called long-range comparison, have argued for the *monogenesis* of human language, the hypothesis that there was a single ancestral language for all the human languages thereafter. Because the hypothesis involves relations with an estimated time depth of over 6,000 years – the widely accepted “temporal ceiling” for genetic classification – the Greenberg school has met fervent criticism from most historical linguists. A multidisciplinary approach involving linguistics, population genetics, and anthropology has only recently contributed to the discussion. What, then, does the history of human evolution tell us about the origin of language?

From the biological end, Charles Darwin (1859) intuited that “the formation of different languages and of distinct species and the proofs that both have been developed through a gradual process are curiously parallel,” and the geologist Charles Lyell also noticed this parallel in 1863, the same year as the linguist August Schleicher independently mentioned the similarity. Recently, geneticist Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza (1988, 1995, 2000) has found a close convergence between the genetic tree of human populations and a linguistic one based on the classification proposed by the Greenberg school. Cavalli-Sforza also mentions the work of such archeologists as Colin Renfrew that may provide further insight into linguistic evolution. In fact, whatever the historical truth should be supported by the multidisciplinary approach. Although certain specific relationships hypothesized by Greenberg and his followers are not without minor potential flaws, the ultimate goal pursued by the scholars – namely, “a comprehensive classification” of all human languages, employing long-range comparison – seems desirable, as the convergence from the diverse sources indicates.

Becky Aronson

Encountering Barriers: The Deaf Community in a Hearing America

The deaf community is an unrecognized yet pronounced subculture that thrives in America today. My research will explore a variety of aspects of this culture, including telecommunications, deaf-deaf and deaf-hearing relationships, and education. Because of the disparate structures of American Sign Language and English, many deaf people find reading difficult and their literacy suffers regardless of intelligence levels. Gallaudet University is the only existing college for the deaf, and my research will

show the difference in teaching and learning styles between this school and other universities. I will find problems that deaf people encounter with everyday issues as well as advances that have been made in order to help them manage in a hearing environment. The deaf are often overlooked by the hearing community and my findings will expose discrimination and intolerance that deaf people receive from the hearing and preconceptions that the hearing believe to be true about the deaf.

Megan Low

### Only in Dreams: Weezer's Success as a Result of Effective Communication Techniques

The language of lyrics is an essential, and often overlooked, medium of communication. Weezer, the rock/alternative band led by singer, songwriter, and guitarist Rivers Cuomo, made its comeback to the music scene, releasing two highly successful albums in the past two years. The lyrics of specific songs coupled with critics' reviews help explain the group's transition from a little-known underground garage band to a model that contemporary rock artists aspire to emulate. Why is their critique of society so appealing and how did they become so inextricably linked to the modern definition of rock?

Karen Zatopek

### Babelfish and the Implications of Universal Translator Technology

In *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* alien and human life should have to face the complication of communicating. Fortunately though, the "babelfish" happens to translate easily any language in the universe and fits conveniently into the auditory canal. Unfortunately, in reality, the answer to universal translator technology is not 42. My presentation addresses both technical and theoretical issues surrounding the creation of a Universal Translator. Utilizing two internet sites bearing the name "babelfish" the complications of creating this technology can be shown. And drawing on my own mind, the desirability of this omnipotent translator is expounded. Would people glue translators to their faces like cell phones? It protects language diversity, but is it at the cost of the nuances of expression?

Tye Pemberton

### Cultural or Individual Voice?: The Tension Between Nominalization and Anthropology in the Works of Ben Marcus

In the preface to his short story collection *The Age of Wire and String* Ben Marcus writes, "This book is a catalogue," that "there is no larger task than that of cataloging a culture, particularly when that culture has remained willfully hidden to the routine in-gazing practiced by professional disclosers." However, despite whatever might ring true in the statement, Marcus's work *is* still a fiction—albeit a strange new breed of fiction—and the way in which he describes America, its history and its present, paints a surreal and bizarre (perhaps even perverted) picture of both Marcus and ourselves. It is the tension between this fiction and the reality he imposes it upon that creates a voice at once universal and yet painfully singular to Marcus's imagination.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9

6:30-7:45

PUB

### Language as Time Machine

Moderated by Paul Lerner

Department of History

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Katherine Peck

#### A Plan for Salvation: Monasteries in Early Medieval Ireland

When Christianity came to Ireland in the fourth or fifth century, it encountered a society that had never been under Roman control. The differences in language, family structure, and ruling class meant that Irish Christianity developed very differently from Christianity on the Continent. I plan to examine the impacts of these developments by considering the differences between the monastic plans and architecture of several early medieval Irish monasteries and those of St. Gall and perhaps other contemporary continental monasteries.

Carmen Gonzalez

#### "You Think You Know, but You Have No Idea.": The Cultural Influences of Personal History

Although the Jewish Holocaust and its implications has become a main chapter in the history of the world, there is an evident lack of acknowledgement for other incidences of ethnic cleansing across the globe, specifically the Armenian Genocide. By analyzing specific texts about the Holocaust, like the *Diary of Anne Frank*, and lack thereof about other such incidences, I will display the cultural effect of personal oral and written histories. Without storytelling, or the re-telling of memories, especially in the form of a diary, history cannot survive. But, it is this same storytelling that makes it possible for one memory to displace another. In an attempt to gain acknowledgement, those who wanted the implications of the Holocaust to be known worked to do so and proved that, in a unified effort, the publication of oral and written sources was the most efficient method to keep memory alive. In contrast, the Armenian Genocide has remained in the shadows, questioning what factors contributed to its displacement in American society. The power of language serves to bring a specific historical event to light in extensive proportions yet is the main reason why other similar events fail to capture attention.

Kristen Taylor

#### Out of Time: *12 Monkeys* and the Fantasy of Time Travel

Modern technology has risen to overcome disease, to alleviate suffering, to promote a higher quality of life—it has even triumphed over space and distance, spanning the world and bringing people together, bridging gaps and creating connections through communications and travel. But science and technology have yet to conquer time. The clock is ticking, and man is incapable of turning back the hands of time and changing what has already occurred. Ever achieving and inventing, the human race is not content with our present lack of control over time. Like the ancient inhabitants of the earth that tried to

reach God—tried to be their own gods—through constructing the Tower of Babel, this generation would like to summit a similar mountain and control not only the trajectory of the future, but the events of the past. Through an analysis of time travel and religious allusions in Terry Gilliam's 1995 film *12 Monkeys*, as well as the short film *La Jetée* (1962) that inspired *12 Monkeys*, I will demonstrate that the ambition of time travel reveals the human fantasy of replacing God, of self-fathering, and of controlling one's own destiny and the destiny of one's cosmos.

Samuel Bazzi

#### Preservation of the Collectivity and the Self through the Arts: The Case of the Palestinian Other

In this paper, I will explore how a resurgence of Palestinian theater, cinema, and other performing arts not only offers this broken people a sense of hope, but also reasserts a socio-cultural identity that counteracts Israeli efforts at national effacement of Palestine and its inhabitants, as it is the very essence of the arts to function as the common language of humanity, as the repository of human experiences, as the transmitter of intercultural dialogue. The Palestinian performances that I examine instill a renewed promise of community, understanding, and peace. By examining these various art forms vis-à-vis the Palestinian resistance, I hope to uncover the power of the arts in providing this young, disillusioned generation of dispossessed peoples with a nonviolent means of self-expression—of preserving their identity and collective memory.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
6:30-7:45  
BANQUET ROOM

I'm Special. Just like Everyone Else: Assimilation and Difference

Moderated by Dallas Willard  
School of Philosophy  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Laura DeMichael

Divided We Fall, United We Still Fall: Language and the Emptiness of Existential Speech

Transcending even his cliché "the sky's the limit," man uses the Tower of Babel as a metaphor for his belief that only superficial barriers block him from unbounded success. The thought that a common language could cause man to undergo an apotheosis assumes that if people could all speak to each other they would communicate for a communal good. It ignores the fact that even individuals speaking the same language do not always understand each other or intend what they say to have value. In dialogues and plays where people must interact, existentialist works evoke a sense of the myth of meaning in and lack of ability of communication. In Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, characters speak just because they are together, with no purpose other than to pass time. A waiter in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" speaks ostensibly to a deaf man, so in reality solely for himself. Kafka's "The Warden of the Tomb" even inverts the Tower of Babel's belief in language as a tool for infinitely improving cooperative efforts, instead showing it as a tool used to tear others down. Thus, since individuals, if intending any ends for their speech, often use language to build up only themselves or, further, to hurt others, the Tower of Babel represents an impossible ideal.

Andrew Orihuela

Spirituality in an Era of Globalization

As the world's "global village" grows smaller and smaller, this community necessitates a new need for tolerance and acceptance among its inhabitants. In this paper, I will approach the phenomenon of globalization in regards to the issue of religious diversity, arguing for religious pluralism and dialogue as necessary tools for meeting the demands of a global society. I will approach inter-religious dialogue from an ethical and practical perspective discussing pluralism centered upon social justice as a step toward combating human suffering and promoting religious and cultural cooperation. Only through a focus on human rights and a validation of religious individuality does a pluralistic worldview hold the key to encountering the world's varied spirituality in this era of globalization.

Ian Maher

Assimilation and the Tower of Babel

The idea of the entire world united under one language and one set of ideals brings up a number of questions asking whether it is feasible at all. One of the most problematic facets of this process would be assimilation. It would force people to give up their cultural past. The problems created by assimilation

can be seen by looking at attempts to meld cultures in the past. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* gives a unique perspective on the assimilation of African Americans into Caucasian America and the difficulties in doing so. This difficulty translates into what problems could possibly arise if the world was unified as one.

Catherine Moore

### Voluntary Solitary Confinement: Virginia Woolf's mistaken view on knowledge and love

In keeping with her philosophy, Virginia Woolf asserts in *To the Lighthouse* that we cannot really love who and what we do not really understand, and as we cannot know anything external to our own mind, we therefore cannot form relationships with others or find order, purpose, and meaning in our environments. Predicated on her gendered characterization of the human mind, she claims that the gulf separating men and women yawns even wider and deeper. Marriage, of all possible human relations, is called most into question. If marriage, the most intimate of relationships, is "inevitably insincere," indeed deleterious, we have little hope for the less intimate relationships between parent and child, brother and sister, teacher and student, and friends. Community, it turns out, is a montage of sorts: isolated, fragmented people are juxtaposed within a common location where interconnectedness is illusory. No genuine relationships exist because individuals are imprisoned within their own mind. We of course claim to love people, but what we love is a construct of our imaginings about them informed by the scant and unreliable data of their speech and actions. Woolf leaves us in the depths of despair, longing to connect but prevented by the limits of our knowledge.

My essay explains that Woolf's epistemological premise is unfounded. Her gendered conception of the mind and her understanding of human nature, specifically the nature of male-female relationships, are anemic, as they rest entirely on her personal experiences. She exaggerates the difference between men and women, choosing to skate over the commonalities found in human nature, which leads to the premature conclusion that individuals are destined to round into themselves, becoming billiard balls that, at best, will bounce off their surroundings and momentarily graze each other in passing. It is my contention that we can adequately know human nature, our surroundings, and other people, which will allow us to form actual relationships and live in a good and meaningful community that furthers the purposes at which human nature aims.

Adam Sevell

### Hollywood's Vietnam and the Evolution of Anti-War Films

For years, major Hollywood motion pictures, through such films as *Sergeant York*, depicted war as a patriotic and necessary institution integral to the maintenance of a purely democratic state. While films produced during the Vietnam War such as John Wayne's *Green Berets* were explicitly pro-war, the post-Vietnam era was witness to an uncharacteristic explosion of anti-war films about the Vietnam experience. In comparing *Green Berets* with Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), this paper will explore how changing representations of the Vietnam War in film forced Americans to challenge popular notions of war and to explore the nuances of military conflict. I will argue that this new wave of films allowed Americans to reconsider popular interpretations of enemy, insanity, identity development, and the "patriotism" associated with war. In this way, the films prompted the reshaping, or at least the reevaluation, of public sentiment about the aforementioned pivotal aspects of war.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
8:00-9:15  
ROOM A

Crossing Boundaries: Cultural Communication

Moderated by Peter Nosco

Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Benjamin Pack

Lights, Camera and God?: Spirituality and Religion in Postmodern Cinema

The surrounding world in many postmodern films appears hostile and indifferent. The characters in such films struggle to find meaning – a purpose to their lives. This longing and need for spirituality reflects the real individual's need to live a meaningful life in a world full of corporate greed, violence and apathy. However, the absence of religion and God in these same films points towards secularism and skepticism. People may crave meaning but, they do not want that meaning dictated by a church or an almighty God. The individual must find meaning on his/her own or with the help of only a select few. The result is an interesting dynamic in which religion remains absent in recent cinema while spirituality gains special prominence. By looking at the film *The Fisher King* (Gilliam 1991) and like sources, I will explore this filmic dynamic between religion and spirituality and some of its meanings on and off the screen.

James Gauntt

Ambassador Britney Spears: Pop Music diplomacy between the United States and the Middle East

Although most of the Arab World is vehemently opposed to United States' political influence, one aspect of America that has been embraced by the Middle East is pop music. As Arabic translations of American pop hits blare out of taxi-cabs on the streets of Amman, Jordan, black-market imports of American records are briskly sold on the street corners of Baghdad. And don't think for a second that the popularity of American music in the Arab world has gone unnoticed by the American Government. In an effort to capitalize on the success of American Pop, the U.S. government funds and operates Radio Sawa, a commercial free broadcast to the Arab World that subtly inserts American-biased news and information between the latest American hits. Although many compare it to bubblegum as a simple, fleeting pleasure, pop music is fast becoming one of the few peaceful links between violently opposed cultures.

Kelsey Dixon

The Guise of Godliness: Biblical Justification of Child Abuse

*The whole earth was made for man and woman related to parenthood, a world in which to rear their young and nurture the mind and body of their offspring.*

--Hazen G. Werner, "The Bible and the Family"

Within the realm of evangelism, there exists an endless bounty of ever-changing, and often conflicting, strategies for proper parenting. Self proclaimed messengers of God readily tout “the word of God” and the instructional nature of the Bible, and confused and insecure parents readily adhere. Unfortunately, the Bible is not a manual of implicit facts. Rather it is a collection of ideas that can be analyzed and interpreted in an infinite number of ways, among which, sadly enough, abuse is included. Regardless of the message its writers meant to convey, the Bible’s subjective nature allows interpretations that can be detrimental, or even deadly, to the children who suffer abuse, in the guise of godliness, at the hands of the adults who are supposed to love them.

Sepideh Saremi

### Blogging: An Introduction to the Potential and Pitfalls of Web Logs

Blogging, or web logging, is the newest media format: A blog is a frequently updated website that usually includes links and personal commentary. Many bloggers believe blogging is *it*—the Tower of Babel for communication, information, and community. Indeed, blogs about everything—personal to political—exist, and the immediacy and interactivity of blogs fosters an online community. Yet the average person doesn’t know what a blog is. This presentation will examine the future of blogs: will they revolutionize communication or are they merely a fad bound to fade out?

Frank R. Kearl

### Quietly Courting Oblivion: Bud Powell the Tortured Genius

Dubbed a genius before he reached twenty, Bud Powell was at the forefront of the Bebop movement which swept the jazz world in the 1940’s. After being assaulted in a flash of racially charged police brutality, his mental health began to falter and he had several bouts with severe depression. The next years of his life were spent in mental hospitals, but Powell made his comeback, pouring his heart and soul into the music he had created. The time spent away from performing and composing took its toll, though, as a lingering fear of being forgotten by society grew. The artist’s connection to the collective memory needs to be regularly maintained, but with Powell in the hospitals little could be done to maintain his legacy. What role should the community play in protecting and advancing the creations of American heroes? How can the artist fend for themselves in the world of shortening attention spans? How will we define our next cultural heroes?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
8:00-9:15  
ROOM B

Space Invaders: Violating Physical and Mental Boundaries

Moderated by Milena Gueorguieva

Department of Comparative Literature  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Tracy Jessner

The Bioethics of Therapeutic Human Cloning: Medical Miracle or Scientific Atrocity?

Biology and controversy have seemingly walked hand in hand throughout the history of medicine. Every new breakthrough often comes saddled with ethical dilemmas, and the complex issue of therapeutic human cloning is no exception. One side supports using somatic cell nuclear transfer to create a cloned pre-embryo, from which stem cells can be removed and grown into cells, tissues and organs, to aid in more effective treatments of countless diseases and injuries. The other side opposes the creation of a cloned human pre-embryo and its subsequent destruction. Ironically enough, although these positions seem like polar opposites, they both have the same ultimate goal: to do what they believe is best for humanity. So the task of the political and scientific communities then becomes deciding which position offers the best reasoning and support, and creating policy accordingly. There is no perfect solution that resolves all the ethical issues brought up in therapeutic human cloning, but a reasonable compromise exists, which supports medical research while protecting the sanctity and dignity of human life.

Emmanuel Caudillo

PTSD and Vietnam: A look at how three men dealt with its afflictions after Vietnam.

Thousands of soldiers were killed during the Vietnam War. Thousands more were physically injured. After the war, there were countless soldiers who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The devastating effects of PTSD affected their lives due to their outburst of grief, guilt, and/or anger. Thus, it changed their livelihood by making it more difficult to work, harder to be social, ruined families, and ended friendships. Many were haunted by the memories caused by traumatic events of the Vietnam War. I will use the film *The Deer Hunter* (1978) in exploring the different devastating consequences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how it affected each protagonist (Mike, Nick, and Steve) in their relationship and how they experienced life with it. I also will explore how each protagonist's experience in the war led them to suffer a certain aspect of PTSD such as apathy for life. Thus, I will demonstrate how experiencing different levels of war trauma influence how PTSD affects a soldier's mental state and their livelihood.

Martha Goodman

### Date Rape Violence and Society's Distortions of Language

*"I get told 'no' and I keep going...Nobody complains afterward."*

*-anonymous male college student*

*--Karen Barret, "Crossed Signals and Mixed Messages:  
Sex on a Saturday Night." Ms. Sept. 1982:50-51.*

It is easy for people to misunderstand long-winded explanations or ambiguous statements that anybody can make. But why is understanding the word "no" so difficult? In my research, I will investigate instances of miscommunication and misinterpretation of people's language, voices, gestures and action as contributing causes of date rape. I will contend that patriarchal attitudes and values which are embedded in our society prevent some men from understanding that "no means no" and that a woman is not inviting sex when she dresses "provocatively," for example. Additionally, through the analysis of three popular made-for-TV films, *When He's Not a Stranger* (John Gray), *She Fought Alone* (Christopher Leitch) and *Date Rape* (Howard Metzler), I will argue that these patriarchal values are furthered embedded in our culture through their respective portrayals of date rape scenarios and the selective use of certain language in other portions of the films.

Brooke Augustin

### The First Time?: Sexual Ambiguity and The Significance of Virginity Loss in a Postmodern Society

Virginity loss represents the primary rite of passage that helps to form an individual's sexual identity. Essentially virginity loss is the crossing of a boundary—that between virginity and non-virginity. However, like many other boundaries, the location of this particular threshold has been shifted and blurred by changing times and especially by the onset of the post-modern era in American society. What constitutes "sex" is an ambiguous concept and thus the boundary between virginity and non-virginity is questionable. This presents an interesting conflict for the youth of present day America. Without a clear separation between virginity and non-virginity it is difficult for individuals to locate themselves in the scheme of things and sexual identity is uncertain. However, I contend that even though post-modern American youth seems to be rejecting boundaries all together, they are simply rejecting boundaries that have been imposed upon them. Post-modern American youth has created its own sexual boundaries by rejecting others. Each individual is engaged in a personal boundary establishment in an effort to define their sexual identity on their own terms.

Jacqueline Deelstra

### Communists, Hippies, Terrorists: Useful Others in the American Political System

Communist, hippies and terrorists essentially have little in common, but looking at American political history in the post-World War II era, all three identities can be categorized as derogatory labels used by the government. The US government through media, education and propaganda has worked to make sure that anyone labeled as any of the three are automatically thought of as evil, undesirable and un-American. Creating these identities and using them to label their opponents as "others" has been a tool

of the government to oust and silence those who disagree with them or threaten their power. My paper will explore the techniques used by the US government to create communists' and hippies' association as being "others" and how in the modern day a similar line has been drawn, as citizens are either patriots or terrorists. In using these labels, whether or not they accurately describe a group or person, the government can successfully discredit a person's opinion and actions and rally support around what they convince to be the more desirable and American way of thinking. This creates a myth of democracy in America as people truly are not encouraged or allowed to think freely or question their government.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
8:00-9:15  
PUB

Assimilating the Inappropriate, Building the Extreme

Moderated by Jim Kincaid

Department of English

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Evelyn Atkinson

But Words will Never Hurt Me: Redefining Insults to Reclaim Power

"I call it 'cunt.' I've reclaimed it: *cunt*." In her revolutionary and empowering play *The Vagina Monologues*, Eve Ensler attempts to redefine a commonly derogatory and hurtful word and to make it instead a delicious celebration of confident, assertive, and sexual women. Despite the nursery-chant that "sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me" and today's increasingly politically-correct consciousness, words continue to serve as weapons – from national threats between governments to offensive rap lyrics to verbal abuse. The connotations and associations of various names – primarily those used to classify minority or oppressed groups, for example: "cunt," "nigger," or "queer" – can offend or empower, depending on the context in which they are employed. What are the particular ways of dealing with a derogatory word? Ensler is only one of the activists who favor such methods as redefinition; for African-Americans and Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Transgendered people, "nigger" and "queer" have become marks of distinction and empowerment instead of hurtful slurs. Yet while LGBTs for the most part favor straight people's use of "queer," "nigger" is still a highly taboo word for anyone of non-African heritage. The redefinition of such insults, then, creates certain boundaries based on who may say them and how they may be used. In my paper, I will explore the reasons for and the effects of redefinition when employed by an oppressed group – namely, how redefinition not only seizes from the oppressors a powerful insult, but also how the use of a former insult provides for increased group solidarity and a heightened awareness regarding just who is and is not part of that group.

Emma Cunningham

Fuck: The Lexical Deviant

What is this fascinatingly deviant nature surrounding the word "fuck"? Its denotative definition is the act of copulation that can be seen as beautiful and life-producing, whereas its connotative definition has sparked a variety of uses and profane meanings. Of all the words classified as "curse words," "fuck" is not only the most taboo but also the most ambiguous and variant in use. This paper explores the full history of the word "fuck" – from its birth 500 years ago to what it has evolved to mean today as a "curse word." The term "curse word" itself is interesting – the original meaning of "curse word" was a term for words that brought about certain curses. What curse has "fuck" brought about throughout its history?

### Violence, Community and Worldviews: Could Hitler's Aryan Nation Be Justified?

There are few names that will elicit as strong an emotional response from an audience as the word "Hitler." Notwithstanding diverse ethnicities, cultures, religions and social backgrounds, the prevailing feelings are those of disgust, horror and sadness. Specifically in America, there are very few who have not heard of the millions of deaths his regime caused, both on the battlefield and in the concentration camps.

Adolph Hitler's desire to create a world-dominating society of "super-human" Aryans was one of the primary reasons for his attempts at ethnic cleansing and world war. Because of the emotionally charged response many people have to his actions, they often fail to analyze these actions in light of their own worldview and the worldview of others. Using Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and several philosophical arguments, this paper will attempt 1) to analyze the atrocities that occurred in Nazi Germany from the perspective of three worldviews: naturalism, post-modernism and moral absolutism 2) and to compare the conclusions formed from this analysis to current and possible future events. Ultimately this paper will deal with the question of whether or not Hitler can be condemned for his actions depending on a person's worldview.

Ashwin Kannan

### The Philosophy of Nietzsche and Underground Music: Influences, Appropriation, Misappropriation and Mutation

In this paper I propose to seek links, between the philosophical works of Friedrich Nietzsche and underground heavy music – i.e. Death Metal, Black Metal and Grind-Core. In doing so I wish to analyse the appropriation, influence and mutation of the ideas of his philosophy in the creation of modern art forms that are both elitist and highly inaccessible. Nietzsche's arrogant, individualistic self exaltation and his declarations of God's death and the universe's chaos are glorified and used as a lyrical, musical and theoretical foundation for the creation of the dense, insidious and abstract soundscapes favoured by these "übermusicians." I shall in particular focus on the works of three bands in the three styles of metal mentioned earlier- the grim world view of the pioneering Grind-Core band Repulsion, the avant-garde Death Metal of At the Gates, and finally the ambient strains of the one man, neo-Nazi Black Metal outfit Burzum.

Repulsion display absolute nihilistic chaos by unemotionally detailing the deadly sudden and repulsive violence of modern industrial death; guitar patterns crash and collide over a furious rhythmic bedrock that is deliberately mistimed to increase the effect of paranoia and despair. Burzum's music reflects the black or blank nothingness of the nihilistic viewpoint by using ambient riffs and repeated white noise patterns that create a hypnotic aural experience. Emotional substance (the human element) is brought into its songs through the opposing use of near intolerable pained shrieks and howls thus representing perpetual human conflict against this pained existence. The lyrics lament the loss of ancient Nordic pagan culture and traditions that better equipped man to deal with life. The death of this system exalting the morality of the strong, due to the Christian invasion of Scandinavia is the subject matter and emotional foundation for Burzum's music and politics. At The Gates represent Nietzschean ideas both directly through their lyrics and through their intricate arrangements, accuracy and speed. They attempt to musically give life and form to the aggregation, collision and release/implosion of human tension, depression and angst. By exhibiting their mastery over the structural constraints and intricacies of music

they claim the right to individualism, power and creativity that they believe has been lost due to human submission to morality, mediocrity and Christianity.

Noah Peters

### Radical Racism in Turn-of-the-Century America

No issue excites Americans like race, and America continues to loudly grapple with its history of racism. Contrary to what many believe, the rise of American racism was by no means an inevitable process, as an overview of the history of racism during the period from the 1890s to the 1920s indicates. Historian Joel Williamson, in his book *The Crucible of Race*, divides Southern philosophy on race into three schools: liberal, conservative, and radical. Because of the rise of Populism, last-gasp Northern efforts to ensure equality for blacks (90% of whom lived in the South during the 1880s, giving birth to the first great wave of anti-black lynchings, widespread and violent rioting, successful efforts to segregate and disenfranchise blacks by law, and the rise of racist demagogues like South Carolina Senator and Governor "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman. Racist theory was justified by the academic world, including widely accepted scientific doctrines like Social Darwinism, propounded by men like Harvard Professor Nathaniel Shaler and Yale Professor William Graham Sumner. The North largely succumbed to the prevailing racist ideology, welcoming such purveyors of racism as Thomas Dixon, author of *The Clansman* and key force behind the film *Birth of a Nation*. My paper will take a historical overview of the prevailing racial views of America during the period from the 1890s to the 1920s, with focus on the widespread racial violence of the period, as well as on Dixon, probably the purest and most influential proponent of Radical racist ideology.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9  
8:00-9:15  
BANQUET ROOM

Get Fuzzy: Subjective Realities or Strains of Truth, Shades of Memory

Moderated by Amelia Hardin  
Department of English  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences,

Andrew Gonzalez

Shaking Hands with Bugs Bunny at Disneyland: The Fallibility of Memory in Eyewitness Testimony

In a recent psychological study, one-third of the subjects distinctly remembered shaking hands with Bugs Bunny at Disneyland. Although the event could never actually occur, psychologists convinced some subjects otherwise, with little more than leading questions and precise word choices. The same phenomenon occurs when people are asked to give eyewitness testimony, and juries can convict suspected criminals on such a shaky basis. Whether intentionally or accidentally, whether done by other people or ourselves, leading questions and confabulation can make us sure that we remember seeing things that never happened or existed. Although the process of detection aims to bring order by seeking truth, such order is difficult to obtain when each person's memory speaks its own language—a language which is sometimes incomprehensible even to the person who possesses it. In order for the legal system to reach the figurative Tower of Babel that is objective truth, the system needs to lessen the weight it gives to eyewitness testimony and reform the methods it uses to obtain such testimony.

Jaime Lee

The Truth is Out There: Memory and the Quest for Power in *The X-Files*

In the television program *The X-Files*, memory acts as an overarching symbol of power. The key conspirators represented as high ranking government officials are well aware of the past and the intricacies of the history they have created for the American people. By controlling the collective memory of a nation, these men have a significant advantage over the truth-seekers like Special Agent Fox Mulder, who struggles to uncover a history that is corrupted by unreliable and fabricated memories. His crusade to save the world from total domination succeeds only as he uncovers more clues about his own shattered past. As his repressed memories return to him, adding to the complex mystery of conspiracy and corruption, Mulder is better able to understand himself and the secrets that separated him from his family when he was twelve years old. Mulder's quest represents his yearning for truth, his desire to reconcile his past, and his unending determination to unite the world against a higher power.

Matt Rubin

From Homer to Stone: The Mythology of the JFK Assassination

*The greatest enemy of truth is very often not the lie: deliberate, contrived, and dishonest – but the myth: persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.*

-- President John F. Kennedy, June 11, 1962

The assassination of JFK was a basis for connection and bond between all Americans who were old enough to be politically aware in 1963. Since that time, a number of theories regarding the details of the assassination, the validity of the Warren Commission Report, and the identity of the assassin have developed, ranging from the feasible to the extraordinarily far-fetched. In Oliver Stone's self-proclaimed "counter-myth" *JFK*, the theories of New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison are presented as an alternative to the "myth" of the Warren Commission. My paper analyzes the film to determine how Stone uses elements of historical fact and speculative fiction to develop his mythology, and I will investigate what aspects make this theory so appealing to conspiratorial minds. More than simply a matter of "suggestive perception," the recognition of patterns based on prior expectations, perhaps there is some logical and rational basis for the arguments set forth in the film.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10  
5:00-6:15  
ROOM A

You're Not Listening To Me: Gendered Stereotypes

Moderated by Michael Blackie  
Department of English  
USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Coral Barreto-Costa

Starbucks, Streisand, and San Francisco: The History of American Gay Culture

Since its break-out beginnings in the 1969 Stonewall Riots, the modern Gay Rights Movement has traversed more than three decades of struggle to obtain acceptance and equality for homosexuals, particularly in the United States. Surviving police attacks, anti-gay legislature, an AIDS epidemic, and strong opposition from the Christian Right, (among others obstacles) gay rights organizations have steadily succeeded in defeating the adversaries of homosexuality and gay culture.

However, its biggest foe yet may be its recent acceptance into mainstream media. With shows like *Will and Grace* and movies like *The Bird Cage* and *In and Out*, both the urgency of the cause and diversity of gay culture are being sacrificed for a few laughs. Is this image of the homosexuality being beamed to millions an accurate depiction? What has it done to the Gay Rights Movement and gay culture in America?

Sarah Kauffman

Women, Sex, and the Media: The Dichotomy of the Virgin/Whore Female Stereotype

The media has changed the way we communicate. Innovations such as television and the Internet bring people together in a common forum, creating a modern-day Tower of Babel. Unfortunately, this togetherness brings about negative consequences, such as stereotyping. These stereotypes of women, and their sexuality, are presented in the media and affect the actions of women in today's society. But how serious is this effect? To answer this question I begin by looking at Erickson's theory of identity to set up what identity is and how its nature feeds into the phenomenon of stereotypes. I then turn to the origin of female stereotypes, the Christian myth of creation, and then move on to modern day examples using television shows such as "Leave it to Beaver" and "Sex in the City." As we explore the question the answer becomes clear: these stereotypes affect all of our lives whether male or female.

Andrew Lessman

Brutal Passion: Attraction and its Culmination in Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*

In my research for this paper, I ran across a student forum where students were asked to talk about what they thought about this play. I found that a number of people shared my confusion with the simplified characterization of Blanche; it seems we all gave her a great deal more credit for being a manipulator who gets what she wants, and were less tuned into thinking of her as a victim. Needless to say, this opinion is not held by many scholars who studied this play. Most, but not all, believe that Blanche was

the victim of Stanley's aggression, and was raped in the climactic Scene Ten. I know from my personal experience that I was somewhat shocked when we began to discuss this scene as a rape in my literature class. Sure, it seemed rough, but at the same time, Stanley was right in saying that it had been coming. The only tension building throughout the play was the sexual tension between these two characters. From the very beginning, they are opposites who regardless cannot resist one another. Their fighting, though certainly vicious, always has an element of brutal sensuality to it. Blanche seems to be self-possessed enough to get what she wants, and given all of her flirting and antagonism of Stanley, there seems to be every reason to believe that what she wants more than anything is a strong man who powerfully place her firmly into her desired role as a delicate belle. No matter the reason for these interpretations, they are nonetheless supported by William's words, and thus I feel they must be allowed to be discussed to allow the work to keep the complexity of this play intact.

Kirsten Ely

### Catherine, Maybe Heathcliff Wants You to Be A Little More Ladylike

From the beginning of time, men and women have been assigned gender roles by society that dictate what their "proper" behavior ought to be. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heathcliff's tumultuous relationship commands the story line. Their conflict is driven by Catherine's aggressive and dominant behavior, traits that are commonly deemed masculine. Through miscommunication driven by disregard for gender roles, Catherine and Heathcliff live out a life of despair, clamoring for love in the end. I will argue that 1) it was the strong presence of desire that caused the two to act with such emotional rashness that resulted in the disregard for their respective gender roles and 2) had Catherine and Heathcliff assumed those gender roles dictated for them by biology and culture, then their relationship would have been successful. My arguments will be supported with examples from controversial essays concerning "proper" male and female behavior in social situations.

Evan Bacalao

### "Dude, the New Man is Dead!" The Reconstruction of Masculinity in the Age of Equality

The closing years of the twentieth century promised the world a new masculine identity; a dish-washing, baby-raising XY in touch with his feelings and gender egalitarianism. The post-feminist men of the Pepsi generation were expected by many to stake their claim as males without subscription to the traditional gender norms that defined Western masculinity; to embrace sexual equality and deconstruct hegemonic patriarchy. America has instead witnessed the birth (or reconstruction) of a man quite different to the "New Man" model of the 80s and 90s; a character who acknowledges and embraces the social gap between men and women, values the traditional masculine paradigm, and places "bros before hoes". This reveals a gender-socialization paradox; why are the male offspring of the Steinem generation subverting feminist principles and advancing patriarchal power? The answer is not a simple one.

This paper begins by examining more closely the actual "new man" character; what he stands for in our post-feminist/post-modernist world, and why he came into being. This is accomplished by combining first-hand experience with close-analyzing of the most popular men's magazine, *Maxim*. Building on recent work of gender scholars this model is then placed into an historical framework, focusing specifically on feminism and the informal "backlashes" that have risen against it. What is revealed is that the men who live by the maxims of *Maxim* magazine are not in fact unique or original, but merely modern incarnations of previous characters; part of a cyclical pattern of action/reaction with the

ebb and flow of feminist principles. Fortunately this circle is asymmetrical, as the patriarchal philosophy that motivates anti-feminism becomes diluted with each generation. This shifts ideological weight from the side of sexism to the side of equality, and may eventually lead to the collapse of the cycle in a manner akin to a broken spinning top.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

5:00-6:15

ROOM B

Life Making Art, Art Communicating Life

Moderated by Kate Lonsdale

Department of English

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Carl B. Miller

Seaside and the World of *The Truman Show*: Why New Urban Towns are Real and Here to Stay

In 1998, people were enamored by *The Truman Show* and the story of Truman Burbank, a man living innocently in the pristine town of Seahaven amidst perfect neighbors. Surprisingly, Truman's universe exists as Seaside, Florida, and it represents a movement in architecture and urban planning, known as New Urbanism, that is trying to achieve a level of community not so different than that of Seahaven. But if Seaside is identical to the "fake" Seahaven, this would seem to cheapen the reality of the New Urbanists' vision. However, there is a vital difference between Seahaven and Seaside that centers around our very definition of what is "fake" and thus harmful. What I will show is that, though physically identical, the fake Seahaven is essentially different than the very real and viable town of Seaside.

Lauren Schenkman

*La Petite Fille Littéraire*: Life Imitating Art and Art Revealing Life in the Novels and Diaries of Anais Nin

The French surrealist author Anais Nin's life and art both exemplify how truth is changed, clouded, or laid bare through the process of writing. Her novels, in their subject matter, explore the revelation and concealment of layers of self and personality, especially in the character of the female writer, while her diaries, which she kept throughout her long and eventful life, are themselves examples of how life is revised through art. The truth of her diaries is complicated by how self-aware they are; although Nin meant them to be reflections of life, which in themselves both preserve and distort truth, she was also very aware that what she was writing was not only bare observation but art. The diaries were meant to be published and read as literature; therefore, where it might otherwise seem redundant, biography points to the half-truths and perversions of truth in the diaries. The autobiographical nature of Nin's novels adds yet another dimension to our incomplete picture of Nin's life, and despite or maybe because of their highly symbolic and abstract nature, are more "true" than Nin's diaries. By looking at how the specific incident of Nin meeting Henry Miller's wife June is "retold" in the first volume of her diary, her novel *Ladders to Fire*, and Dierdre Bair's biography of Nin, my paper will examine how the truth of life is preserved, heightened, or destroyed through its artistic retellings.

Joshua Daniel Katz

John Cage's *4'33"*: A Silent Movement in Music

John Cage, 20<sup>th</sup> century's most prolific avant-garde composer, recognized inherent faults in the traditional beliefs about music. In particular, Cage found that music was both ineffective and ill-suited as

a medium of expression. Although he had been taught to communicate through music, many of his attempts appeared to be miserable failures. When he wrote a sad piece people laughed and when he wrote a funny one they stared crying. Seemingly trapped in a Tower of Babel, John Cage went silent. In 1952, Cage composed his best-known piece and the one he regarded as his most important: *4'33"*, a composition in three movements, lasting four minutes and thirty-three seconds. In its performance, Tudor, an accomplished pianist, sat at the piano but never played a note, his silent performance framing as music all the unintentional ambient sound, including wind, rain, and the perplexed mutterings of the audience. In this paper, I will demonstrate that *4'33"* is a meta-musical critique of conventional music; a denouncement of the institutional aspects of music's functioning. Further, I will show that this piece reveals the core of Cage's radically altered aesthetic, a conception of the musical form, composition, and experience that emphasizes presentation rather than expression.

Katherine Vang

### The Oneness of One, The Oneness of All: Alexander Nikolaievich Scriabin's Pursuit of Reconciliation in *Mysterium*, his "even greater symphony"

*I can't understand how to write only "music" now. How uninteresting it would be. Music, surely, takes on idea and significance when it is linked to one, single plan within the whole of a world viewpoint.*

-AN. Scriabin

Composer, Theosophist and amateur philosopher Alexander Scriabin struggled, through alternate phases of depressed seizures and manic elation, to create a work that, when fused with the arts, philosophy and all of the senses, would lift humans to the state of ecstasy: the final, apocalyptic synthesis of all humanity, the transfiguration of the cosmos. During his short life (1872-1915), Scriabin worked in and became an integral part of the thriving, dynamic Russian cultural scene at the turn of the century: the Symbolist movement was under full swing, the arts thrived, and the murmurs of Revolution were rapidly developing. Scriabin's ceaselessly inquiring mind and musical genius led him to embrace the ideas of Theosophy and Occultism, in which Western Christianity, Eastern Buddhism, science and philosophy were synthesized, and art became "the synthesis of matter and spirit." To this end, Scriabin wrote his music, sometimes accompanied with color-organs and various other mediums, in order to universally communicate directly to human souls.

As he pondered the synthesis and universality of the world, however, Scriabin simultaneously struggled with the oneness of himself - a powerful form of Solipsism in which he was God - which formed a complicated tension the notion of total unity. This philosophical approach has led him to often be perceived today as a megalomaniac with eccentric ideas, and tragically, Scriabin died at an early age without ever having actually worked on his "greater" work. Yet within his life, music and ideas, is an ideal microcosm in which to consider the tension between the individual and the universal. Is it possible, in a world where each person is the God of his or her respective universe, to ever create the powerfully unifying force that Scriabin so passionately sought?

## The Pottermania Conundrum: How a Boy Wizard Unites and Tears Apart the International Society

In the span of a few years, a bespectacled young wizard claimed top prize on two fairly different bookseller lists. The first was the coveted New York Times bestseller rankings, where at times two or even three of the Harry Potter volumes would dominate the tip of the iceberg simultaneously—an unheard of phenomenon as the adult list became overrun by these "children's" books. The second, according to the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the ALA, was the "most challenged books" list. Fundamentalists declared the novels a supporter of witchcraft and pagan practices; libraries and schools banned the series from their shelves; parents feared its non-Christian qualities. Why does a simple fantasy story construct such a literary Tower of Babel by both uniting an international audience with universal comedy and then tearing itself apart because of its effortless attraction? A deeper look into the Harry Potter books and their author may unearth the secrets behind its magnetic effect on almost all that cross its path, and how it manages to create such an arena for controversy.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

5:00-6:15

ROOM C

That Old Black Magic: Consequences of Being Larger Than Life

Moderated by Sean Zwagerman

Department of English

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Hazel Lebiga

The Evolution of the American Idol

*The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long.*

--Bladerunner

In a mere decade, it isn't hard to notice the fall and rise of stars in America's entertainment industry. So many extremely talented artists and intellectuals of our lifetimes, and those in centuries before, have fallen victim to their addictions and lifestyles. In fact, it has almost become a paradigm to witness today's heroes descend into scandal shortly after reaching the peaks of their careers. Is this occurrence entirely subject to one's character? Or is there some greater force at work? I will demonstrate how the statistical phenomenon of regression to the mean is behind the one-hit wonders, the Michael Jacksons, and the Mariah Careys. An understanding of regression to the mean will not only change the way one looks at entertainment, but also every other aspect of one's life.

Megan Peticolas

Sexual Desire and the Monster in All of Us: A Gothic Look at the Dark Side of Human Nature

Within the gothic novel, there is a tension between primal desires and accepted social behavior. The real self walks the line between these two opposing tendencies. In general, the individual wants to be a part of society and accepted as a productive member of the human community: an ideal self. But the ideal self is inherently asexual. So to be a part of the human community is to be without sexual desire. Thus, the individual must struggle against the subconscious yet still powerful desires of the carnal body. The individual or creature that forgoes all of the benefits of society and gives free reign to the desires of the body, thus crossing societal boundaries, is the epitome of the other. Once a character has become an other, sexual desire becomes the key to achieving his or her own ends. In other words, the other takes control of and uses sexual desire as a tool, whereas the self avoids desire at all costs.

In the novels *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, and *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley, the struggle of the real self is easily discerned. Some characters are definite others, some are drawn into becoming others, and some manage to successfully fight against the influence of the other, but all must face the other's temptation. The key determinant of the character's state of being (self or other), or change in state of being, is to what extent the character is able to overcome his or her desire for the body.

Clive Stanger Davis

### God of Plastic, Hear My Cry: A Serious Supplication and its Ridiculous Responses

In 1692 Sarah Osbourne was hanged as an agent of darkness. In 2003 Ozzy Osbourne is a hailed pop prince thereof. This madness seems linked to Nietzsche's proclamation that God is dead. But in God's absence come bizarre replacements: with the notion of an *Übermensch* with right-by-might to whatever high seat he desired, Godless humanity scrambled for Jacob's ladder. And when they reached the top, the weirdest conjured extra plastic rungs and plastered heaven with neon billboards. The desire to be goodly and godly has been replaced by that to be like crazed pop icons. Mankind lusts to place something above itself; God or plastic, it doesn't matter. There's a new God, in fact. Media conglomerates control his celluloid body. And he's coming for you.

Catherine Wheeler

### Maya Angelou and her Power of Communication

Maya Angelou is a modern-day shaman. Her autobiographies tell the story of her life, but she writes them with a broader focus than simply her own life or identity. She is a spokesperson, a storyteller in the form of the African *griot*, reflecting and interpreting her community. The *griot* tradition has its roots in West African history as the honored name bestowed on wise and knowledgeable storytellers entrusted with the pivotal task of documenting tribal histories and genealogies. Maya Angelou is a modern *griot*, passing on the history of her people through anecdotes about her own past. Her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* succeeds as both her personal memoir and also as a strong testament for all African Americans of success over opposition. However, following the tradition of the *griot* as an oral storyteller, Angelou's spoken narratives carry far more power than her written accounts. She draws on her oral foundations located in her background with the church, spirituals and storytelling, and from personal experiences in her youth that caused her to realize the power of the word. Due to the power of expression and the emotionalism in her voice, she possesses an ability to turn her autobiographical "I" into a universal "we" that expands past just the African American community and touches all who hear it. She makes her audience "get the spirit" as the preachers from her youth did to their congregations. It is almost as if she has them under a spell. The otherworldly quality of her speeches strike a chord; there is a definite power in her voice that, like the mythical Tower of Babel, "speaks to a population of exiles and displaced others" representing "a spiritual fortress in an increasingly secular world."

Cristina Rosales

### God is Dead – No, Wait, I Mean Paul

John Lennon's declaration that the Beatles had become "more popular than Jesus" was no lie. Popular culture, by the time the Fab Four ascended the dizzying heights of fame, had created its own deities, and worshipped them accordingly. The public's obsession with John, Paul, George, and Ringo, pop icons newly representative of divinity, embodied the culture's value of the secular over the sacred. This fixation became at times disturbing – all manner of crippled people, including children, made their pilgrimage to the Beatles' dressing room in the hope that these demigods could heal them. The Beatles themselves denied any supposed claims of divinity; Lennon was the first to note that the Beatles were "the biggest bastards on earth." Yet their fans, and even their detractors, seemed anxious to portray them as

larger than life. Through piecing together the assorted “clues” that seemed to hint at Paul McCartney’s untimely death, fans-turned-detectives thought themselves closer to the divine than those who denied this “truth.” The public, it seems, has always wanted the Beatles dead – ranging from the fictitious conspiracy involving McCartney, to the tragic murder of Lennon, to the attempt on George Harrison’s life, the Beatles’ ubiquity only exacerbated the public’s fascination with the sanctified, insinuating that perhaps, in this respect, the Beatles were not so unlike Christ after all...

THURSDAY, APRIL 10  
5:00-6:15  
BANQUET ROOM

Bad Boys, Bad Boys, Whatcha Gonna Do?

Moderated by Martin Krieger  
School of Policy, Planning, and Development

Ray Ibarra

Determinism and its Exceptions: Reconciling Science, Nietzsche, and the Spiritual

Nietzsche tells us that God is dead, that the universe progresses only by necessity and that our anthropomorphic and moral aesthetics are worthless. Whether or not we believe him, if we accept the expanding evidence that the brain works through causal events and that Newtonian physics applies to increasingly smaller particles, we are forced to at least ponder the question of determinism. Determinism is the argument that man, and man's mind, is but a machine with a predetermined course. It is a denial of the spiritual which becomes increasingly acceptable in our increasingly secular world. It is even the assumption of some work in such sciences as psychology and communication, but it is a topic from which we shy away to protect our well entrenched beliefs about morality and free will. Yet the trinity of science, Nietzsche and determinism is not altogether opposed to a spiritual conception of the world. At the very least, there exists an ambiguity in scientific theory that leaves room for the existence of a free will, a soul, or a God.

Brieann Fant

Investigative Profiling: Method or Madness?

Our society is captivated by the idea of the "expert." Be it in the form of a highly-skilled doctor or intellectual leader in their field, these individuals' knowledge and abilities command a great deal of respect from us who are less learned. In recent years another "expert" profession has been added to the mix: the criminal, or investigative, profiler. These individuals are even more revered because the profiles they create help catch the most dangerous criminals, whose actions threaten the safety and well being of our society. The profiler's role has been highly dramatized in the media, television, and literature; as a result, the public has developed false expectations of the method and its effectiveness. In this paper I examine the profiling process, from the specific steps involved to the history surrounding its development. I will accomplish this goal with reference to the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*, which, although overtly sensational, also elicits doubts as to the validity of the process and its results. The contrasting assumptions from film and reality lead to an overall assessment of the profile's function as an investigative approach.

Jonathan Vaccaro

Rhetorical Violence

Despite 200 years of democracy both individuals and organizations alike still resort to violence to gain a political voice. Can violence be an effective way to be heard? From the Black Power movement to modern terrorism who is being heard and why?

Jennifer Gantwerker

Malice or Fear? Action or Reaction?: Interpreting Behavior in Shakespeare's *Othello*

My paper will discuss the character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. He is often labeled by critics as merely evil – a source of unexplained maliciousness. And his unwillingness to articulate the reason behind his schemes, even after their violent consequences have occurred, can be used to substantiate this idea. But to accept the prospect of his evil nature blindly may be to ignore a crucial aspect of his character and greatly oversimplify human nature, for Iago, in planning the destruction of nearly every character in the play, is not merely acting but is reacting. He sees others as a threat, and he is lashing out at what he sees as their desire to displace him from his job, his marriage, his sense of self. As can be seen in Shakespeare's text, he is haunted by Cassio's appointment to the job he believes he is entitled to, and by rumors that Othello has had an affair with his wife. He must eliminate this threat or risk his own survival, and this may be a very human instinct towards self-preservation at work. Therefore his portrayal in the 2001 movie *O* as a tragic figure, as a misguided and ultimately self-destructive but not altogether unreasonable human being, while not in accordance with many interpretations of the character, may be viewed as truly faithful to both Shakespeare's intentions and the inherent nature of man.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10  
7:30-8:45  
ROOM A

The Tower of Technology: Where Does It Lead?

Moderated by Karen Kensek  
School of Architecture

Emi Yamaguchi

Build-a-Baby: Designing the Ideal Human Being

When a working draft of the human genome sequence was completed in June 2000, the implications of being able to map the billions of base pairs in a human being became far-reaching, stretching not only the boundaries of science but of ethics as well. Now it is possible to analyze, and therefore manipulate, each gene in a human being. In a time when genetic engineering is an exploding field full of the possibility of altering genetic characteristics, the consequences that may result venture into the realm of what was once the science fiction of artificially designing a baby. These so-called designer babies allow doctors to play with the ideas of normality and natural conception, and in doing so doctors can increasingly “play God” as they and prospective parents re-define what it means to be a “natural, normal” human being.

William Mallison

The Power of the Atom, The Wrath of God: Cultural Chaos in *Kiss Me Deadly*

*(FBI Agent Murphy notices a radioactive burn across Mike Hammer's wrist)*

*Murphy: Where'd ya get that? Now listen, Mike. Listen carefully. I'm going to pronounce a few words. They're harmless words. Just a bunch of letters scrambled together. But their meaning is very important. Try to understand what they mean. Manhattan Project, Los Alamos, Trinity.'*

*--Kiss Me Deadly (1955)*

This paper explores the nuclear bomb's impact on American cultural values through the prism of two texts: Mickey Spillane's 1952 Mike Hammer novel, *Kiss Me Deadly*, and its 1955 motion picture adaptation written by A. I. Bezzerides and directed by Robert Aldrich. Frequently, the novel and the film differ in key areas, such as characterization and plot. Spillane's own conception of his most famous character represents a hero of the old school, a prototypical tough, bent-on-justice private eye who even spouts out suave one-liners before dispatching an antagonist or two with his trusty sidearm. The Mike Hammer of Bezzerides's and Aldrich's creation, on the other hand, is without the heroic touches of his original blueprint, uncultured, misogynistic, and greedy. Narratively, nuclear weapons figure into the plot of the film although there are none in the novel, and one ultimately defeats Hammer. By analyzing how the motion picture *Kiss Me Deadly* emphasizes the worst qualities about its hero, and then places him into a situation that he is completely impotent to manage, it becomes plain that Bezzerides and Aldrich are questioning the validity and relevance of the Mike Hammer's type of values in an uneasy era of nuclear proliferation and mega-death tolls.

### The Tower of Cyberspace: An Analysis of Cyberpunk as a Response to The Tower of Babel

The “Tower of Babel” teaches us that technology is destructive. But why does expanding technology necessarily spell doom for human civilization? In his “cyberpunk” novel, *Neuromancer*, William Gibson addresses this age old issue for a contemporary audience that may not readily accept God’s absolute disapproval with technology. Characteristic of *Neuromancer* is ambivalence towards technology. While “cyberspace” causes the human body to be reviled and disdained as “meat”, the advent of artificial technology (AI) surrounds itself with visions of change, for better or worse. Gibson asserts that the dilemma lies in man’s directionless urge for technological advancement. The technology we create traps us in a never ending cycle of self-destruction which cannot be broken until true understanding of technology and its future direction occurs.

Adam Spieckermann

### The Tragedy of Creation—*A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*—A Tale of *Paradise Lost*

The most widely known Western creation story is Adam and Eve. While given definitive treatment in the bible, the most complex and intriguing recasting of this story is Milton’s epic, *Paradise Lost*. Creation stories tend to give humans a feeling of identity, of their place and responsibility in the world; they explain the unexplainable and establish a chain (or hierarchy) of relationships. The creation longs to connect with its creator—to understand why it was created, why they are separated, and to affirm a mutual love. The creation and creator are separated by impenetrable, different planes of existence—man has inherited the earth, but he’s alone in his sentience.

So what happens when man decides to create an object in his own image to love him? The Steven Spielberg film *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* addresses this question. It is the story of David—the Adam of the evolved mechas that narrate the story—the first robot created to genuinely love a human. He is not just programmed or hardwired for stimulus and response; David is created to innovate and feel—a surrogate human; a perfect simulacrum of man. Through David’s story the evolved mechas of the future tell of their creation, their reason for existence. And for us—the audience—the story reflects on our own desires and beliefs in our relationship with the divine. *A.I.* is not an allegory to *Paradise Lost* but by examining both together they enhance and illuminate the inherent complexities and thematic richness of a creation story. In this respect they speak to us viscerally, about the very nature of relationships and love—the raw, often unpleasant specter of what it is that makes one human.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10  
7:30-8:45  
ROOM B

## Speechless: Alternate Forms of Communication

Moderated by Paul Alkon

Department of English

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Tina Billard

### “Cell”ing Ideals: Sociopolitical Commentary in Cartoons

Sociopolitical commentary in cartoons has shifted completely in the past 50 years. Where Porky once memorized his Pledge of Allegiance under the tutelage of Uncle Sam, Lisa Simpson catches a congressman taking bribes. Where Daffy Duck once hit Adolph Hitler with a mallet, Stan Marsh now has a heart-to-heart with network executives and angry parents in defense of a cartoon's first amendment rights. Not only have the targets of critique become broader, the tools of commentary have changed to reflect the more subtle approach being taken. Originally, slapstick was the main method chosen to show who the villain was, and there was never any sympathy for its target. Now slapstick is almost never used, and when it is it is to create contextual irony – the main weapon of the modern adult cartoon.

As a rule, modern sociopolitical-commentary-based cartoons rely on coolheaded satire to make less exaggerated criticisms of less caricatured figures. The cartoons critiques are in every way more moderate, and allow for a more intelligent audience's own free thought. This evolution demonstrates the growing respect for “intelligent” cartoons over the course of the last 50 years. As the cartoon developed into a medium acceptable for adults, the concepts came to be on more of an adult level. Now, there are cartoons geared specifically for adults that aren't just animated sitcom like *The Flintstones* before them. There is no deference to church, government or the Boy Scouts of America just because they're American institutions. The cartoons cannot afford deference to anyone without compromising their nature. Without their ironic use of overtly moralized sociopolitical commentary, the shows would have no content. Everyone and everything is a target because social critique is not only the defining feature of the modern adult cartoon, it created and *is* the modern adult cartoon.

Jonathan de Kay

### Visions of the Spiritual World

Can you experience the same spiritual feeling from looking at a painting as you may feel whilst reading a prayer or looking up in church? While the answer may sound smug, it is a simple yes. Religious vehicles, such as prayers, architecture, or symbols, are sometimes designed to have the same effect on the participant as some kinds of art. One category of art that specifically bears close similarities in design to religious conventions is visionary art. Religious vehicles often use design features such as repetition, illumination, and unique spatial orientation to send the viewer mentally into another realm. Surprisingly, visionary art makes use these same characteristics in order to achieve the same effect. The realm that can be reached by using religious vehicles and visionary art is a realm of preternatural brilliance and spirituality. This realm should be seen more as a mental “state” than an actual physical state. Works to be

examined during this comparative paper include: Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, John Donne's "Divine Sonnets", Aldous Huxley's *Heaven and Hell*, visionary paintings by Scott Cranmer, Christian hymnals, and pictures of religious architecture.

Toby Jacobson

### Mathematics: The modern Babel's language

The Tower of Babel may be compared with humanity's striving for intellectual perfection and omniscience. As the Tower reaches for heaven, so do mathematicians and scientists seek intellectual completion. Mathematics, the common language of scientific expression and communication, is thus analogous to the unified language of the Tower of Babel. Despite an international scientific community, ideas can still be relayed regardless of a common spoken language. In this paper I will explore the origins of mathematics as distinct from traditional spoken language, and the obstacles to a more common knowledge of the mathematics.

Lexa Burton

### Disney and Miyazaki: The Transcendence of Filmic Communication

The dream of a common language is not so much about language itself, as an ability to communicate on a universal level. Art—and, in modernity, film as a primary vehicle—is, by nature, an attempt at communication that transcends language. This can be proven by comparing the works of Japanese filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki and Walt Disney. The films of both men have been translated for major theatrical release the world over to great success. Miyazaki's work is as deeply rooted in Japanese culture as Disney's is in that of the Western European fairy tale tradition. In spite of this, the nature of film allows transcendence of such cultural barriers to a level of emotional communication that is, indeed, universal.

Matthew Borba

"And then I'll be free of the past": Reference and Retelling in Bernard Herrmann's score to Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

... a cinematic gem that becomes more lustrous with each decade.

-- *The New York Post*, October 4, 1996

The 1958 film *Vertigo*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, is considered a classic of American cinema by many. This presentation focuses particularly on the musical score of *Vertigo*, composed by Bernard Herrmann. The film's score not only contributes greatly to the film and complements the story the film tries to relate, but also creates a web of strong "external" links to other musical works and traditions, including pieces of music such as Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, and George Bizet's *Carmen*. These links and references to important works of classical music position *Vertigo* in such a way that the score of the motion picture allows for a complex, multi-layered understanding of the film as a whole. Whether explicitly or implicitly, this position allows the film to take a story about a retired detective and a woman hired as an accomplice to a murder on the Northern California coast, and create much broader, if not entirely universal implications of that story.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10  
7:30-8:45  
ROOM C

## Madness, Mistrust and Memory: Fracturing the Mind

Moderated by Peter Stokes

Department of English

USC College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Nicole Jilly

### Dichotomous Paranoia: Erecting and Obliterating Communal Progress

In my paper, I will contend that paranoia—as depicted in Thomas Pynchon’s novel *The Crying of Lot 49*—endeavors to reach a level of comprehensive, God-like understanding of truth, while simultaneously demolishing this pursuit through distrust and suspicion. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, is tormented by her perpetual paranoia of a worldwide conspiracy, which is fostered by the ambiguities of language, expression, and intention that often characterize human communication. The text itself is likewise elusive, with tangents, indiscernible detail and an all-encompassing vagueness, mimicking the hindrances of understanding in everyday speech.

Although this novel evidences the strains on our comprehension of language, it also reveals our desire to strive for some understanding, some common language. Interpretation is in fact a tool of understanding; one of its primary definitions is a “translation”. Pynchon’s novel *The Crying of Lot 49* may illustrate the prevailing effects of miscommunication, however the attempt to decipher statements and read intention ultimately conveys the human strive toward commonality.

Scott Callaghan

### The Fight for the Self: Memory in Multiple Personality Disorder

The ideals of intercultural unity and universal peace are ones that humans have sought to fulfill for many generations. We yearn for the legendary Tower of Babel, to understand each other and work together for a common external goal. Yet those afflicted with multiple personality disorder (MPD) seek to resolve the conflict that goes on inside their minds. Though everyone’s memory depends on one’s state of mind, MPD sufferers take this concept to an extreme: often their various personalities cannot retrieve memories stored by other personalities. Their tricks of memory can be even more bizarre, for not all memories are equally irretrievable. Though memories vulnerable to interpretation are likely to be blocked, mostly factual memories have a much better chance of being shared. In addition, the more effort put forth, the more amnesia dominates: explicit, forced memory recall demonstrates less transfer between personalities than implicit recall.

Jacob Cruz

### The Aesthetic Process of Charles Bukowski’s Alcoholism

Charles Bukowski is a writer. Charles Bukowski is an alcoholic. The two attributes intermingle in a way allowing for the keen literary flavor associated with the man, the self-proclaimed “dirty old man,”

that “drunk ol’ Bukowski.” I focus on a uniquely Bukowskian process of literary creation as influenced by a deep-rooted alcoholism which proves to be such a vital element in propelling the creation of Bukowski’s work, as well as being a significant theme in the work itself. Through various biographical and auto-biographical accounts, and extending into a few of his key works, I will expose how alcoholism incorporates itself into Bukowski’s writing process, and how alcoholism is, for Bukowski, a muse of sorts, a stimulant, aiding him in reaching the idiosyncratic state of mind he often desires in order to create, and communicate through creation.

Azita Mirzaian

### Drugs, Gore, and Death: What Media Coverage Says about Societal Values

According to your average nightly news television program, the apocalypse is upon us; teenagers all across the country are being corrupted by violent video games, turning into hardcore drug users, and killing their peers in school shooting rampages. In actuality, none of these so-called “threats” are as serious as the media makes them seem – they are simply sensationalist threats that the media focuses on for the sake of ratings. But how is the media so confident that these sensational stories will get viewer attention and get them the high ratings that they want? What do the stories that the media and public prefer to focus on say about American culture and society?

Marcus Phillips

### Polaroid Perception: The Mutability of Reality Construction as Exemplified by *Memento*

Throughout, the film *Memento* purposefully and artfully conceals itself and its mysteries. Secret truths and interpretations emerge at unexpected moments that redefine the context and even the very nature of the film. This experience resembles that of each Babylonian as s/he finds ever-new context among recent strangers. I submit that these frequent reinterpretations (speaking both culturally and filmically) signal a type of ‘personal reinterpretation’ that every human necessarily practices. Characters come and go, motivations reveal themselves or simply change, and we accept each new element seamlessly, without damage to our perception of reality. Somehow, we have learned to alter our understanding of the world at the speed that the world reveals itself to us. Biblically, this very necessary coping mechanism originated at the Tower, as Babylonians inflicted upon themselves a new, protean social context by attacking their one immutable fact: God. Lenny, then, is the ultimate Babylonian, for his adventure, and his choices spring most centrally from an ability and a need for constant self-recontextulization. Impotent to truly change the elements of their realities, Lenny, the Babylonians, and humanity elect a position of interpretive power, as it is ultimately the strongest influence they may exercise on their reality.

THURSDAY, APRIL 10  
7:30-7:45  
BANQUET ROOM

Come Together: Breaking down the Need to Know  
Moderated by Rabbi Susan Laemmle  
Dean of Religious Life

Rebekah Ward

“Did You See That!?”: Exploring the Perception of Normal among Culture, Religion, and Personal Point of Reference.

A traveler expects to discover new and exciting things on his journey; it is the driving force of his voyage. At times, however, the traveler will encounter things that surpass all of his expectations; he might have trouble processing and reacting to these strange things. This is what happened to Tony Hawks when he observed a man hitchhiking with a fridge in Ireland. He did not know how to respond to this unusual sight and afterward it plagued him for years. These peculiarities will make an impression the traveler and shape his experience of new places and people. Some travelers will adapt easily; others will not be able to overcome these differences. Each culture and person is shocked at something different due to varying life experiences and community values. This paper will look at travelers' encounters with peculiarities and strangeness. I will try to determine why we are stunned by some things and not others, and I will discuss how the travelers react to events and experiences a native might not think twice about. By examining these things, I can gain a better understanding of communication or miscommunication among individuals and cultures.

Vaninder Kaur Dhillon

The Language of Sympathy: The Importance of the Visual and Written in Social Documentation, as introduced by James Agee and Walker Evans in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

It is desire that brought author James Agee and photographer Walker Evans together. Desire to document the individual experience, an invisible reality. Desire to dignify individuals whose circumstances classify them in society, but whose lives and emotions deserve sympathy. A revolution in social documentation occurred when Agee and Walker entered the homes of three sharecropping families in Alabama in the 1930s, and carried those lives into *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* so that the individual existence and experience could breathe in written and visual communication. Photography and literature simultaneously work to elicit the true nature of reality in hopes that the reader can find sympathy for the individual in context and consequently secure the “promise of community, understanding and peace” on a human level. This paper will discuss how photography and written text in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* cannot be divorced from one another because the only way Agee and Walker create a bridge of commonality, a language of human sympathy, is by allowing the reader to see individual existence and then read the true unseen reality in order to understand the individual experience.

Whitney Williams

### Seeking True Communion from the Holy Grail

In the film *The Fisher King*, directed by Terry Gilliam, Gilliam explores difficulties with understanding and problems of communication. Much like in the legend of the Holy Grail, where the debility of the king leads to disaster and destruction, so does the failure in communication in this film contribute to the chaos of communication among characters. Throughout the film Gilliam reveals numerous instances of failures in communication, many of which stem from feelings of isolation. His presentation of the quest for the grail is a symbolic representation he employs to serve as some goal representing the achievement of communication. Because this communication is finally achieved, he concludes with the conventional happy ending.

Lindsay Hagans

### The Sum of the Parts: Unity and Strength in Gloria Naylor

Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* is a unified novel that is broken up into seven shorter, yet still interconnected stories. The loss that each woman carries with her doesn't necessarily have to be a negative loss, as they struggle together to rise from the projects and battle down the demons of the past that unites them. The women come together, in need, in memory, and in loss, to try to make Brewster Place a better home for themselves. In each story, the woman in focus remembers why she is living in Brewster Place. She remembers the dreams she had before she lived there, how those dreams died, and why she was forced to move to Brewster Place. The common thread that wraps around and through each woman's experience is that each one of them had her dreams shattered. They come together in pain of those memories and try to heal the wounds that have never fully closed.

Shir Pridonoff

### Terror Builds a Tower: The Classic Murder Mystery as a Model for Communication

Reaching, groping for the sky. The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel symbolizes an attempt to work toward something higher, aiming for that almost untouchable goal. It represents a world in which people must collaborate, must communicate. Only when they accomplish this will they reach an understanding.

But in order for people to reach an understanding, they must be brought together by some circumstance. There must be a calling, a motive, a trigger – some coincidence that connects them all to each other, and all to the larger picture.

Before the destruction of the Tower of Babel, everyone spoke the same language, came from the same part of the world. There was no coincidence; everything was intentionally uniform. God saw this and wanted to help his people. He realized that "nothing [would]...be impossible for them" (Gen 11:6); goals would be too easy to reach. Living like this would make life pointless and empty. God wanted man to have more, not only to have everything but the experience of working toward everything; he wanted man to have communication.

The classic murder mystery is an exemplification of how God meant the world to work when he destroyed the Tower of Babel and scattered the human race. In solving a mystery, there always exist elements of connectedness through coincidence, as well as those of communication to accomplish a goal.

In a mystery such as Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, the characters are tied by a common bond, a sort of coincidence, which helps them to work together to accomplish their goal. The detective in the story also must use his communication skills with the people and with the clues to accomplish his own goal. Coincidence, communication, and goals are what make the world turn, what make life interesting and worth living. God destroyed the Tower of Babel to create meaning in life.



Program and poster design by Ananda Jacobs

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