INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2012, Forbes and Fifth was only a suggestion: a name scribbled on a piece of paper, one of many ideas on a list of potentials we might one day call our little publication. Also on the list were Bellefield, Bigelow Blvd., and the slightly different Fifth and Forbes. Basically, any Oakland street name we could come up with was on that list. We needed a name for our work that could live up to our plans: combining artistic pieces with scientific research and offering it all up in one place. Forbes and Fifth Avenues run parallel through the University of Pittsburgh’s campus, two streams of consciousness seemingly unconnected. But there is an inside joke on Pitt campus, telling those looking for directions to meet at the intersection of Forbes and Fifth. We’ve adopted that joke as our name, because we are that intersection – the intersection of the arts and the sciences, connecting all paths of study into one meeting ground where collaboration creates new boundaries. And so, Forbes & Fifth was born, and in only two years, it has become so much more than what we ever imagined.

Every semester, we’re surprised by the quality and variety of the submissions we receive. The first issue of Forbes & Fifth was an experimental leap of faith to see how successful a student-run interdisciplinary publication at Pitt could be. Now, we are an example, published bi-annually, of what undergraduate students can do. From Japanese translations to lyrical essays, shoulder girdle research, biological poetry, anthropological analyses of Mongolian folk-rock, and everything in between, we’re constantly seeing exciting, new ideas meeting on our grounds. We trust in our fellow students, and they don’t disappoint. Even more exciting is how we have become an internationally recognized magazine – an enormous leap from our local beginnings. The enthusiasm of our readers, the devotion of our staff, and the spirit of our contributors have made this all possible.

It is with great happiness that we present our fifth issue. We are confident that you will find satisfaction in whichever academic practice led you to us, but we also hope that by opening these pages, you’ll fall in love with something foreign and unexpected, as we do every semester.

“We are the makers of music, and we are the dreamers of dreams.”

– Roald Dahl

Enjoy.

The Editors
When first experimenting with scotch tape, I became interested in its ability to shift between transparency and opacity through layering. After documenting my trials, I noticed that when photographed, unevenly layered scotch tape squares create a convincing pixelated quality due to the flattening effect of photography. These discoveries accumulated into a process of carefully, repetitively applying scotch tape squares to my clothing, and then photographing the object upon a neutral, white background.

In my process, tape represents my skin and clothing is surrogate for my body. As I peel tape from the roll, the tape collects microscopic residue of my skin, which is quickly re-adhered to my “body.” The body is displaced and then immediately replaced. In the final translation, the body is displaced once more through photographic documentation. Through my processing, I create a tension between the body existing in real space and the body existing in digital space. The material square of tape and the illusion of the pixel pull at each other, thereby creating a strain between the body existing in digital or real space. The apparent duality and separation between absence and presence, real and virtual, material and immaterial, are distorted and lost.
Ignacio Lopez is a University of Pittsburgh undergraduate majoring in Studio Arts and Fiction Writing. He experiments with empathy and psychology in his writing to bring the reader closer to his characters to contrast the ‘quick glance’ generation of iPhone and laptop users. In his art, he mostly does large scale black and white pencil work of people, stores, cars, and anything that challenges him.
We had finished picking spring’s potatoes, and Julio and I were out of a job for the season. The farmer paid us in the shed with cash because he didn’t want any witnesses. Other farmers were telling on each other for hiring our kind. We looked for ads in the newspapers that had little to say, they didn’t ask much at interviews and we got the game.

_Hire me, I work, you pay me._

There was this one ad with a cartoon bee on it and a phone number. “Bee”? I asked Julio. _Si, “abeja.”_ Canning would have been nice but I was sure they did that in factories where they’d ask plenty of questions. Julio called either way, _what do we have to lose?_ He answered in his nice thick English accent and shot me a sly smile: Don Juan asking about bees. He listened to someone on the other end, and with a curious glance hung up.

_We do an interview and we get the job,_ he said.

_Okay, what is it?_ I asked.

_Are you allergic to bee stings?_

The day was sunny and sweet. Julio and I were on the 71A to a bum town outside of Idaho. This was a normal routine for us in between seasons, long rides on buses with stares from sleepy travelers. It reminded me of Mexico, when I took my family to the market on Sundays. My daughter would fall asleep on my lap after a long bus ride home. Now it was just Julio and me. We could see the farm lands turn into meadows ’til finally we reached Bethal Road. We walked down Bethal and saw an old white house, like a cloud that had fallen from the sky with its seams undone. A sign reading _Uncle Earl’s Beehive Emporium_ stood in front of us as we crossed the lawn to the house. We headed straight for the front door and were welcomed by a strange little white man before we could even ring the bell. He squinted through his thick foggy glasses that made him look a bit _retardado_. When he realized why we were there, he finally spoke.
You here for the job? he said in a scratchy voice.

We nodded.

This isn’t Rodney’s Ranch, you understand, I don’t pay for extra work and don’t expect you to do any. Got it?

We nodded again.

You’re hired.

We looked at each other, thinking this was too good to be true: no papers, no interviews. The Little Guy showed us around the house and to the back, into a large wooden shed where glass tanks stood with amber liquid shining in them.

This here’s the honey mine, it’s all the honey we collect for the season ’til they migrate out of here. I know it’s not much, but you can’t just squeeze everything out of the poor little suckers, they need some themselves.

He showed us back outside to where, at a distance, we could see little white cabinets scattered in a field. Before we left the honey mine, he stopped us and said,

You’re going to need one of these.

He strapped on a large hat with a net over its brim and a white track suit.

I hope it’s not a problem. It’s a requirement for the job.

Before I could laugh, Julio hit me in the ribs.

It’s good, Julio said and gave me nudge to agree with him.

The noise outside was incredibly loud and static. We walked to the nearest beehive cabinet in the fields, where bees were clamoring in and out of their hive. Then the Little Guy opened a shelf in one of its sides and pulled out a rack of honey combs.

This is it, what you’ll be doing. You just use this here smoke pump to calm them and get the rack inside and drain it of honey. But be careful,
they know what’s up. They don’t like anyone going near their queen, am I right, boys?

I nodded, again going along with Julio.

After the first week and twelve bee stings, I had a dream of bees. Of people living in those white bee stacks, in their little golden hexagonal apartments. I thought I saw my wife, all dressed up at the entrance of one. Then a large haze came over me and woke me up. Julio’s little girl stared at me, her little princess skirt chafing with the sound of bee wings.

_Time to wake, Señor Vargas_, she said and tapped my forehead with a plastic wand. Julio came in and told her not to disturb me.

_Leave our guest alone, hija_. I smiled at her.

My own daughter, María, would be around her age. She was with her mother in Mexico City, and both were praying I wouldn’t be forced back via a federal jet plane and handcuffed. She would send letters to Julio’s wife, the only legal resident in Julio’s house, on how much my daughter missed me. How my wife missed me. About her problems, and toys she bought her, the neighbors, who’s in prison, who jumped the border. I needed to read this. There were codes and other clues travelers told me to look for in letters. It wasn’t good if your wife said she was doing, “fine,” “okay,” “all right.” If there were only a few sentences, and only about the kids. All this came to read simply: I’m whoring or selling drugs. I planned on sending her a letter along with my pay via Western Union at the end of July. I’d ask her to buy María a princess costume and to send me a picture of her.

Halfway through the season, Julio and I noticed a few more of our kind on the bus. We asked where they were headed and they told us they were going out the same way, a few miles away from Bethal Road to Rodney’s Ranch, which had beehives and other work. They had already been hired. We kept our chatting to a minimum, sharing our experiences with each other but never about work. We swam in gasoline in that bus – if anyone was dumb enough to ask about our jobs, or theirs,
they’d be throwing a match into the pool. You didn’t ask about another man’s current job, not when they were so close by; and not when they were your competition. You could end up in a very twisted game. Once July was over we could be buddies, all of us looking for job.

A week later we came to work to find the little man crying in the shed, all the beehive cabinets smashed except for two. He held a matchbox with injured queens and some dead ones. El Ranchero, he said, then screamed it at us. Julio and I faked our empathy. In Mexico we’d have already been killed. After clearing and fixing what we could, the little man took us inside the shed and asked us what we would do to make some extra pay. If we would do bad things. There had always been a choice for our type. You could go the straight and narrow to make some slow cash or you could take the fast route. I had been offered it before through sex and drugs. But I had a family, and so did Julio. Both routes would take us to jail, we’d seen it happen before. But without a job or cash my princesa wouldn’t eat. The workers at the ranch knew this the first day we met on the bus. They saw food coming out of their families’ mouths and into our own.

The next day we were all on the bus. All of us. The other Mexicans wouldn’t look at us, everybody was too ashamed. I wondered which one was missing, whose friend was gone and halfway to Texas with a wad of cash El Ranchero had given him. Was it similar to the deal the Little Guy had cut with me? Julio couldn’t believe it when he translated the plan to me, but promised me that his cousin could take me up in Wisconsin. I would have to start over, yes, but with eight grand in U.S. dollars my family would eat well for a year.

Vargas, come here.

The Little Guy took me aside and into the honey shed.

There are a few supplies here for you and a cot for the night. I’ll drive you back to the city and pay you then, in the morning. Clear?
He put his hand on my shoulder as I studied the equipment. *Sí, señor.*

*Good. It isn’t easy to do this but I play fire with fire, I don’t bullshit. I’m sure you boys don’t either.*

He left me inside with a canister of gasoline and a hatchet, a revolver between the cot and honey tanks. I had no real clue on how I would pull it off. I only had a few translated directions and one clear goal from the Little Guy: “Burn.” Julio wouldn’t talk to me the rest of the day. He knew he wouldn’t be seeing me anymore. Even if he could, he wouldn’t want to.

That night, after Julio left and the old man went to bed, I got ready. I walked in the dark trying not to trip over irrigation ditches ’til I finally saw the place. The property was surrounded by a fence of cattle wire and had to be twice as big as the Emporium. The lights shining inside didn’t show much, but there were people still up and awake. They were probably waiting for this. I went around the back, behind a barn and to the barely lit beehive field. I decided to pour the gasoline on the beehives and hoped not to wake them, my revolver ready in hand in case *El Ranchero* saw me.

As I lit a match, in between cabinets of quiet, sleeping bees, I saw my hand shake. The match struck along its box but fell below me, near the canister. *Mierda,* I breathed. I lit another and threw it on the hive and ran. In an instant the aura of fire engulfed me. It was quiet and beautiful ’til the buzz of startled bees became more pronounced. The crackle of wood burning and bees buzzing for help followed me as I ran past the house of *El Ranchero.* A pair of floodlights came on and caught me in their gaze. A man appeared on the porch with a gun. As I was pulling mine out I saw a little girl at the window, her silhouette causing me to pause. So young and unafraid. A bullet hit near my feet, and I picked up my pace into the darkness of the night. I ran quick, tripping once in a ditch and spraining my ankle. Getting back up, I turned around and saw the glow of the fire. My fire.

I laid on the cot unable to move, a bottle of old aspirin from the beehive suit trunk my only medicine. I waited for the day to come and was surprised when no sirens or police drove by the house. For a time I
passed out due to the pain and exhaustion, but in the cold break of day the Little Guy kicked my bed to awaken me.

*Well done, my friend.*

He helped me up from the cot and noticed my leg. He asked if I had gotten attacked.

*No, señor.*

He helped me inside and gave me a pack of ice and some medicine. The envelope of cash he gave me felt light. With eight grand, for what I had done, I should have been content. The envelope should have gleamed like silver dew on a leaf. It should have been more to me. Tears began to well up in my eyes.

This was the most money I had ever had in my life. It felt worthless.
As a Malaysian growing up in Singapore, Asian culture (and especially Southeast Asian politics) has been an integral part of Michelle Yaw’s life. Like many contributing to this journal, she believes that the visual arts can influence and shape society. Studying Art History at Georgetown University has allowed her to explore the intersections between art, international politics theory, and social realities. “Old Tensions, New Meanings, More Healings” reveals her interest in the various endeavors of the art world as well as in Cambodian art, sparked by her experience in a community development project in Phnom Penh.
OLD TENSIONS, NEW MEANINGS, MORE HEALING
AN ANALYSIS OF THE SEASON OF CAMBODIA, CAMBODIAN RATTAN: THE SCULPTURES OF SOPHEAP PICH

Introduction

Throughout April and May of 2013, ten elegantly latticed rattan sculptures were hung amidst the gallery spaces of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s South and Southeast Asian galleries. Cambodian artist Sopheap Pich (b.1971), the centerpiece for the museum’s contribution to the Season of Cambodia: A Living Arts Festival, created these sculptures. The exhibition was promoted and perceived as the highlight of the national cultural festival organized by Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) and a variety of institutions in New York City. Along with this, the Season of Cambodia and the Met presented Pich as the pioneering symbol of Cambodian visual artistic revival, in contrast to most approaches to national cultural festivals which either focus on the propagandistic messages of the country’s organizers or criticize the festival’s exhibitions as “self-Orientalizing.”1 The literature surrounding Pich applauds his artistic development as an internationally recognized Cambodian artist.2 However, the juxtaposing approach of the Met’s special exhibition, as well as the “young” flare of the Season of Cambodia, calls for a more subtle analysis of Cambodian Rattan as part of the urgent debates regarding post-conflict resolution.

The role of Sopheap Pich’s work at the Met exhibition is less of a result of his “Cambodian artistic genius” than a constructed product of the intersecting agendas of the different organizers. On one hand, Pich’s work fits with the “new cultural renaissance” image promoted by the CLA, who hope to extinguish the general perception of Cambodia as the once-great Angkor Kingdom that turned into a horrific economic and cultural desert after the Khmer Rouge purging. On the other hand, by showcasing a contemporary Cambodian artist within the permanent
South and Southeast Asian galleries, the Met uses Pich’s works to emphasize the museum’s commitment to contemporary art in developing nations. Importantly, the motivations of these partners are framed and complicated by tensions involved in using art to assess the success of post-conflict resolution. While the CLA believes that international support for Pich’s art will help Cambodians overcome trauma and contribute to civilian-driven peace building, the Met designates craft in Pich’s work as an aesthetic and psychological gesture for “authentic” Cambodian, and even Asian, contemporary high art. The tensions played out in *Cambodian Rattan* bring to light an attempt to challenge Western ideas of Cambodian art and culture through unconventional festival exhibition strategies and an emphasis on craft in Pich’s art. Yet, the solo retrospective might also reinforce certain Western assumptions about Cambodia’s post-conflict resolution process and international relations. In light of emerging art historical, museum, and post-conflict discourse, this paper argues that *Cambodian Rattan* demonstrates the complex relationship between national culture festivals, economic development, and political institutions.

**Season of Cambodia and Post-Conflict Reconstruction**

With a mission to “serve as a symbol of [the] country’s resilience as a post-conflict nation and reflect[…] Cambodia’s thriving cultural development,” the *Season of Cambodia* showcased a variety of Cambodian musicians, dancers, and visual artists through highly publicized exhibitions, performances, lectures, and workshop activities at partner institutions in New York. The cultural festival was considered a successful form of “cultural diplomacy,” as it provided a platform for post-conflict Cambodia. Cambodia’s current third-world status and identity remains influenced by the impact of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime (1975-1979) and its social reengineering drives to create a classless, agrarian society. Artisans were attacked and any form of artistic production associated with elite intellectual bourgeois was banned. Today, the corruptions of the government as well as the country’s poverty issues
shape international post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Like many in Cambodia’s significant NGO sector, the CLA is an organization founded by a returnee who supports “civil social development” through the arts.⁶,⁷ The CLA aims to nurture, empower, and promote the efforts of Cambodia’s younger generation to learn by reinterpreting the country’s cultural traditions as a form of “capacity-building.”⁸,⁹ The Season of Cambodia encompassed CLA’s renewed mission to raise awareness and financial support for Cambodia’s young artists. Sopheap Pich, an Amherst and School of the Art Institute of Chicago graduate and ex-refugee, had recently gained some recognition in the international art world. Represented by the leading Tyler Rollins gallery, Pich has exhibited at international galleries, particularly in Australia, Southeast Asia, and biennials like the Asian Art Biennial (2011), Documenta 13, and Singapore Biennial. Pich’s work was showcased in several Season of Cambodia events¹⁰, and his sculptures were exhibited at the Met. During a timely period that coincided with the Cambodian national day and the recent death of King Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012), Cambodian Rattan drew audiences of the Cambodian citizen and diaspora community as well as New York residents and tourists to the retrospective, composed by the CLA and Met to call upon a renewed interest in Cambodia’s post-conflict future.
Cultural Revival and Cambodian Contemporary Art

As with all Season of Cambodia activities, but especially Cambodian Rattan, the CLA organizers portray a thriving cultural society that successfully overcomes trauma through expression and innovation in the arts. This constructed image was meant to supersede traditional assumptions about Cambodia’s present identity: that of a romantic lost Angkor civilization to a contemporary Kampuchean holocaust. These two opposing points frame Western ideas (French colonialism and American liberal democracy) of the “other” Cambodia in its post-conflict state. Cambodian Rattan attempts to deconstruct and reform the view of Cambodia’s fall from the zenith of the Angkor Empire (10th-15th centuries) when Khmers dominated Southeast Asia. The ancient temples and sculptures that were to form a large part of the Met’s Southeast Asian collections were venerated by colonial tastes as artistic masterpieces. Such images associated with Cambodia’s violent but thriving golden age are supplanted by stark images of Pol Pot’s killing fields and Tuol Sleng signifying an intellectual and artistic vacuum since “Year Zero.” Wary that a gaze of Cambodia as stagnated by trauma might in turn hamper the efforts of Cambodia to develop, the CLA sought to expand the scope of common Western ideas to include a progressive future. In this sense, Edward Said’s post-colonial divide between the Self/Occident and the Other/Orient situates an asymmetrical perception of a post-Khmer Rouge desert alongside an “authentic” revived Cambodia throughout the Season of Cambodia. Importantly, while these contrasts create certain tensions, the CLA does not vehemently reject the effect of post-conflict trauma in Cambodia. Rather, it is the very process of dispelling the externally formed image that catalyzes CLA’s post-conflict reconstructing efforts of helping Cambodians face and overcome trauma.

In order to counter Western perceptions of cultural stasis, the Season of Cambodia had a particular emphasis on youth, change, and newness. As indicated by the festival’s temporal title, events signaled that a new generation of Cambodians were ushering in a season of hope, progress and artistic revival. While the preserved practices of “old” masters were celebrated, organizers looked passionately forward at contemporary cultural production, rather than back in time. This strategy
stands in contrast to other national cultural festival exhibitions that Brian Wallis notices hold exhibitions of national artifact “treasures.” Furthermore, the CLA and Met activated a self-critiquing approach to turn Cambodia’s negative image into a positive one while avoiding “self-Orientalizing” the artist on display. By exhibiting contemporary works in *Cambodian Rattan*, both institutions displaced expectations about what constitutes national Cambodian art. The ancient sculptures of the Angkor kingdom are as relevant to Cambodians as new art made by artists who break away from the horror that plagued their society. Immediately, Pich’s abstracted sculptures struck viewers as unexpectedly “contemporary” as they appear to align with Western notions of modern or contemporary art. Additionally, the exhibition material, wall labels, and lectures held in conjunction with *Cambodian Rattan* emphasized Pich’s ability to traverse “Oriental” definitions of Asian art and art making. Therefore, instead of dramatizing conventional versions of Cambodia’s national image, *Season of Cambodia’s Cambodian Rattan* avoids amplifying the destruction of the Khmer Rouge or Cambodian artistic heritage and shifts the Western gaze towards a hopeful, youth-centered culture and art.

This progressive, positive tone attracts the foreign support so essential to CLA’s efforts in Cambodia. A declaration of a “new cultural renaissance” and “revival” permeated the *Season of Cambodia* appealing to Cambodians and Americans to support young Cambodian artists financially and socially. Such rhetoric denotes two of the CLA’s claims in post-conflict resolution efforts. First, it wanted to demonstrate the psychological and economic positives of engaging the arts in post-conflict peace building. Along with the rising acceptance of art therapy in the field of psychology, *Season of Cambodia* sought to connect the healing from trauma to the revival in artistic production. In this vein, Cambodia’s artists have broken away from the “pathologisation” of failed states, contributing significantly to the art world and, by extension, the international world. Secondly, the festival itself is meant to be a model for other post-conflict communities and nations. The international recognition of Pich is thus extrapolated to the future success of other young Cambodian visual artists who were featured in the *Season of Cambodia* in other partner institutions. For Cambodians and the di-
aspora, the “revival” of Cambodian arts increases national and ethnic pride, encouraging financial contributions to the country. Even though all the organizations involved were separate from the government, the *Season of Cambodia* was a festival of and for the people as a nation. The artist and his work become synonymous with the cultural maturity of a resilient “imagined community.” For American viewers, there is a cultural and moral impetus to support Cambodia’s new renaissance and help to lead it further into the 21st century via professional expertise and monetary support. This transitional “season” is the overarching urgency for international support and the underlying possibility of “missing out” on the opportunity to catalyze and foster regeneration in a post-conflict society. CLA’s ability to gain the attention of the Met, an international cultural authority, also legitimizes its claim of artistic revival.

As such, the partnership of the *Season of Cambodia* and the Met downplayed existing political tensions and the unfinished post-conflict resolution process. None of the institutions that worked with the *Season of Cambodia* were associated with the Cambodian government according to CLA co-founder John Burt. Hun Sen has been accused of immense corruption. Trials of ex-Khmer Rouge members give rise to domestic and international contention, dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Observing these “truth-telling justice” events, academics and policymakers debate and assess the effectiveness of international law and post-conflict reconstruction methods. The CLA, however, places itself and the *Season of Cambodia* in a different sphere of contention where art reveals the achievements of post-conflict resolution. Moving away from the potential for political controversy, the Met’s selection of Pich’s less activist works displayed little open criticism of the government. Though Pich himself avoids commenting on politics, some of his other sculptures like *Compound* (2011) evoke more overt statements than the focus on universal themes of pollution and rural destruction in *Cambodian Rattan*. Pich’s work, curated to avoid overt politicization, proved a suitable balance to represent Cambodia’s contested post-conflict image. Instead of playing to international attention pointing to friction, the CLA chose to stress hope for this social movement. The Met and CLA organizers proposed this multifaceted festival as an alternative model to the cynicism that plagues
the image of Cambodia as a cultural desert.

**The Museum and Rethinking Cambodian Art History**

One of the main facets of *Season of Cambodia* was the Met’s ex-
hibition of Pich’s sculptures that aligned with the festival’s aims, the museum’s institutional initiatives, and curatorial authority. Through the unconventional display approach in *Cambodian Rattan* and its choice of Pich, the Met portrays itself as an ethical, innovative, and discursive space, rather than just a historical site. In a sense, the Met, like the CLA, aims to expand the gaze of its audience through *Cambodian Rattan*.

*Cambodian Rattan* represents the Met’s aims to become a serious competitor in the field of contemporary art. The exhibition is part of the increased number of contemporary art exhibitions, acquisitions and initiatives overseen by a new curator and a new department devoted to art of the 20th and 21st centuries. The Met’s authority in the art world is built upon its encyclopedic collection of historic “masterpieces” over a span of time and space. Its recent institutional attentions expand the Met’s conventional scope and appeals to different audiences. Indeed, for the Met to establish Pich as its first solo exhibit by a contemporary Southeast Asian artist speaks to both internal and external interests at play. Externally, the Met is building a relationship with Cambodia by becoming a leading partner in this cultural renaissance and thus as an educational resource to young generations or diaspora about Cambodia’s art, her glorious past and future. As part of this diplomatic relationship, the Met announced the repatriation of two 10th century Khmer statues or “Kneeling Attendants” that were smuggled out during the civil war of the 1970s. The repatriation also highlights the Met’s professional willingness to meet growing concerns about museum collecting ethics. Along similar diplomatic lines, the museum’s contribution to the festival through *Cambodian Rattan* materializes the Met’s efforts to show support for contemporary art in Cambodia and other developing Asian countries.

While special contemporary art exhibitions at the Met are not new, *Cambodian Rattan* is particularly open about how it is exploring the relationship between old masterworks and “new” art of an emerging international artist. Works of major contemporary artists are installed on the Met’s rooftop on a seasonal basis. “Representation/Abstraction in Korean Art” (Nov 2010-Mar 2011) is the only other exhibition that integrated contemporary art works of Asia with traditional works. An
ability to experiment through the temporary exhibit thus proves helpful in merging the Met’s interests with the *Season of Cambodia*’s aims to dispel Cambodia’s image as a scared, artistically drained country. Guy’s innovative curatorial model followed Wagstaff’s vision for the museum to be “in the vanguard of reinventing a new understanding of what art means.” Sopheap Pich’s work is therefore employed to expand the museum’s stake in the art historical arena while showing how a museum can become a site of post-conflict reconciliation. As part of this model, the exhibition interweaves contemporary works to lend permanent pieces fresh interpretations and deeper understandings about the complexities of South and Southeast Asian art. The display choices of the curator also underscore his assertion that Pich is placing himself within post-colonial discourse. Pich’s use of Western concepts of space, linearity and object combined with personal memories of Cambodia’s resilience, religion and landscape keeps the artist’s work in a transnational sphere of “Asian” art. The Met’s permanent collection pieces are displayed in galleries that employ “masterpiece” practices of display in clean open spaces or in galleries that contextualize the works in “typical” architectural settings. Guy seems aware of the criticisms of such display formats that competes to define “Asia” and attempts to revitalize the permanent collection space with the freshness of Pich’s sculptures.


In this vein, Pich’s sculptures are strategically positioned to transform
the decontextualized spaces and help to draw art historical relationships on aesthetic, religious and regional levels. By placing artworks that look “contemporary” next to Asian ancient objects, the show connects to the discourse stemming from the MOMA’s “Primitivism” and Magiciens de la Terre. In one gallery, the juxtaposition of the ethereal hollowness of Pich’s Buddha 2 against the solid resilience of Angkor stone sculptures suggests a haunting discontinuity between past and present in Cambodia (See Figure 4). Here, the Angkor sculptures, deemed by the colonial French ideas of Beaux-Arts as the epitome of ancient Khmer artistic mastery, signify traditional notions of Cambodian art and culture. Guy hangs the silhouette of a Buddha—cut short at the chest by strands of rattan with blood red tips—at the very center of the gallery space. This gesture dramatizes the gap between ancient traditional Khmer art and recent artistic destruction of the Khmer Rouge that stagnates the Western gaze of Cambodia. At the same time, the ghostlike piece echoes the forms of the surrounding sculptures, emphasizing the continued practice of Buddhism in Cambodia. As a result, the exhibition model encourages dialogue about colonial and post-Khmer Rouge ideas of Cambodian “essence.” The show posits that the destruction of temples and cultural sites in Cambodia did not completely eliminate art making forever. In another gallery, the exhibition undercuts art historical narratives about the influence of Indian art on Southeast Asia, and thus, Cambodian styles by positioning Upstream within the vertical space of an Indian temple replica (See Figure 5). Pich’s interpretation of fish traps is used to signify cross border interactions question misconceptions of Southeast Asian artistic originality. Such subtle, yet acute, relational display methods heighten certain art historical debates, encourage multiple readings and transform the Met’s gallery spaces into sites where Cambodian contemporary art can help form a better understanding of South and Southeast Asian art.

Sopheap Pich: Craft as Authentic Cambodian High Art

Furthering CLA’s belief in the power of art in overcoming trauma, Cambodian Rattan places a national and artistic value on the elements of craft in Sopheap Pich’s high art. In fact, the show’s title ties national identity to the material of rattan, revealing that the Met distinguishes Pich’s approach as not only high-end but also essential to understand-
ing authenticity in Cambodian post-conflict reconstruction. Both organizations hope to assist a developing nation’s post-conflict communities in overcoming trauma through art. Guy stresses the role of “memory and place”—psychological aspects of trauma—consistent in the art’s content and medium. Distinguished from other visual artists featured during the festival, including the internationally recognized Leong Se-kong, Pich uses localized traditional materials used in handicrafts, such as basket weaving, as structural frames. While his pieces explore Western minimalist approaches in aesthetics, Pich’s ability to streamline memory and Cambodian identity begin with the “discovery” of rattan as a suitable medium for applying avant-garde formalist concepts. The agricultural materiality of the bamboo is subtly seductive to the eye and imbues the works with romance of natural craft. As a result, Pich’s particular approach to what constitutes transnational Asian art is unlike the other Cambodian artists appropriating photography, performance, painting and video medium. Cambodian Rattan suggests that craft does not dilute intellectuality in contemporary art but creates a paradoxical image that is closer to the truth than the Khmer Rouge picture of permanent trauma.


Pich’s work also turns associations of inferiority into strength, trau-
ma into art. The Met’s interpretation of craft as a material-intensive process that guides the artist through a complex journey of consolidating identity is key to the Season of Cambodia’s overarching aim. For example, the artist’s process of craft making, especially the selection of bamboo from the hard and dangerous environments of rural Cambodian provinces, is on a video played on the screen in the gallery. These practices link Pich to Cambodia’s largely agrarian society, to Western Arts and Crafts movements, to feminist contemporary artwork and the spirituality of Land Artists. Viewers imagine Pich twisting and weaving the strong yet flexible dried bamboo. They are thus encouraged to relate to Pich’s sense of catharsis from trauma in technique. Rattan is designated a national material that helps Pich negotiate his identity between diaspora and Cambodian identity, finding Cambodian authenticity on the way. Furthermore, handicrafts form the bulk of goods that pass through tourist industries; the Season of Cambodia was also trying to promote this fact. In this merger of CLA’s hopes for artists overcoming trauma and the Met’s new definition of Cambodian authentic art, Pich’s work becomes a platform to promote a new post-conflict understanding of the power of art. Pich’s multilayered work addresses high art and craft, trauma and healing, destruction and post-conflict building. The CLA and the Met chose to emphasize art’s transformative influence in aesthetics, psychology, and nationality. Through unconventional exhibition techniques, the Met furthered the nationalistic purposes of the Season of Cambodia. The Met presented the museum as a sacred site, where confronting tensions in art can help overcome post-conflict trauma while critiquing Western ideas of Cambodian art, culture and identity.

However, “authenticity” remains an embattled term within the Asian art community and the post-colonial discourse. The festival exhibition is framed by certain beliefs about how post-conflict reconstruction should come about and how criticisms of these beliefs should be considered. Caroline Hughes’s studies of Cambodia prove to be especially enlightening about certain assumptions regarding trauma, capacity building, and flawed international intervention. In political terms, the exhibition and Season of Cambodia act as examples of international roles in the politics of authenticity in post-conflict reconstruction. By placing Sophoep Pich, a member of the Cambodian diaspora and returnee to the
urban Phnom Penh, as the model for Cambodian nationality, *Cambodian Rattan* runs the risk skewing the potential for such agents to transform post-conflict politics in the right direction. According to Hughes, it is problematic as they “represent attempts to smuggle Western hierarchies of knowledge into post-conflict reconstruction efforts under the cover of ethnic solidarity, to the detriment of local participation and empowerment.”\(^5\) Pich is, however, willing to admit these tensions. In response to a question regarding his status as an international representative of Cambodian art, he says “I’m still viewed as an outsider sometimes and other times not.”\(^5\) Such tensions regarding authenticity on political and social levels seemed to be skimmed over in *Cambodian Rattan*.\(^5\) Instead, the exhibition warrants the healing qualities of craft as a sign of authenticity in Cambodian art, furthering the nationalistic beliefs of *Season of Cambodia*.

**Conclusion**

The tensions that *Cambodian Rattan: The Sculptures of Sopheap Pich* raises deconstruct and illuminate the complexity of art from Cambodia. On one hand, Cambodia’s status as a developing “post-conflict” nation involves the different but often overlapping interests of multiple actors at political and cultural levels. For young Cambodians, artists, museum institutions, American viewers, and the international community, the partnership of Cambodia Living Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art produced a space for rethinking assumptions about Cambodia’s artistic past and present. By legitimizing the psychological power of art, innovating exhibition methods and building cultural diplomacy, the institutions portrayed a congruent message about how far Cambodia has come since the end of Khmer Rouge rule. In that process, the Met used Pich’s craftsmanship and Cambodian identity to project a new standard for ethical, innovative and culturally sensitive ways of displaying contemporary art. The show’s ability to question the Western gaze in art history and museum culture with Pich’s work melds well with the *Season of Cambodia*’s overall mission. Indeed, the new definitions and strategies of seeing craft as high and authentic Cambodian contemporary art prompts new research breaking down hierarchies within art historical media. *Cambodian Rattan* sets itself as a post-conflict resolution model
for the assessment and critique of post-conflict resolution studies. Caroline Hughes’s studies of the effectiveness and authenticity politics of international intervention in the form of the diaspora community, returnees and NGOs might criticize the homogenizing individuality of Pich’s retrospective. But the exhibition is only part of the festival’s diverse approaches and events that show heterogeneous and holistic points of view for post-conflict Cambodia. Cambodian Rattan nonetheless largely succeeds in revealing existing tensions, opening the possibilities of newly defined meanings and encouraging the developing efforts of Cambodia’s artists. Whether CLA and the Met’s efforts will translate into tangible sociopolitical effects in Cambodia’s post-conflict peace building drive is Art and Craft in American Art. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Katherine Mooney is, first and foremost, a gypsy soul wandering in a beautiful world. She is additionally a proud Pitt Panther, an English Literature and History double major aiming for a certificate in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, a member of the Class of 2016, and an avid lover of life. Besides musing on such topics as the passage of time, the transference of memories, and the progression of love, she also enjoys watercolor painting, reading Tolstoy, kayaking, singing, knitting, baking, and creating outlandish puns.
I don't know how it happens
Just so
With a flourish, and is gone.
A slip, a fall, somewhere bruises form
on knees or elbows scrubbed raw
in the old metal tub.
I don't know how it happens
That one day we halt the coffee,
or fold the newspaper,
put down the feet and stand up, wavering,
uncertain and lost.
I don't know how it happens
how fleeting love can rise and fall
like an ever-flowing tide,
weeping, bringing abundant, destructive waters,
and retreating far into dark, untrodden caves,
leaving desolation and words floundering about
like dying fish upon the beachside.
The sea breeze rusting your
metal locket, causing rashes on your ashen face.
I don't know how it happens
how understanding and compassion splinter,
one day,
out of the deep blue sea,
and you stand there, feet being cut by
the blades strewn across the rocks.
A barrier of salt and iron
stands defiant between you and where you once
saw sunlight dancing on the white-capped waves.
I just don't know how it happens
how it happens so suddenly, and yet
it is discovered over long amounts of time,
skipping rocks across the surface of
a riptide current that pulls you out to sea
for one purpose and one purpose only –
to drown you among the tangled seaweeds
and salty brine and crumbling shells.
Did you hear me?
To drown you in the great blue.
I don't know how it happens
and yet it did,
and now I cannot span this great sea between us.
Julie Morrissey is an undergraduate senior studying English Writing in the poetry track at the University Pittsburgh. She hopes to graduate in the fall of 2014. For her, writing is not writing without an element of stealing. She believes one should never be afraid to take whatever language is not one’s own, for these snippets of text, however insignificant, represent a resonance in one’s world.
SNAPSHOTS OF THE FEMALE BODY

Lately, there have been so many stories. Too many. The girl with the glittered lower lip and crinkled hair saying, *but it was just his birthday, you know, I was just the girl to him, you know.* He had grabbed her from behind, thought it was sexy. Another friend couldn’t let go; she stayed the night. Another receiving lewd calls at a concert because they knew she was drunk enough. To talk back means to be dramatic to be a crazy-ass girl who needs something up there.

Why does this keep happening?  

*Hold Me While I’m Naked*, 1968
16mm film transferred to HD video
Color, sound; 15 min. (10)

**Snapshot #1: Ass / A Song**

You heard the voice first. “Where you goin’?” You were drunk. Two younger men found you as you waited in line for a beer. Your family was still in their seats; you had decided to get a drink on your own.

When intoxicated, your eyes aren’t as focused. I find the black gaze of your sober quietness one of the most compelling aspects of your face. Charged. Usually in a small-lit room, where you would pick up clothes, hang up the blazer worn to work that day, fold blankets over the mattress. A soft focus. The strength

*It was the planet you were flying away from* - (14)

The two guys were laughing, punching each other, because, oh, you looked back. I heard you say “That bothered me. They knew what they were doing. I was intoxicated and alone.” A Pearl Jam concert.

Everyone was so high
you said the smell
made you almost vomit.

*Bingo*, 1974
Color silent; 18min.(10)

*Oh Dem Watermelons*, 1965
16mm film
Color, sound; 11 min.

Originally produced as a theatrical intermission *on the watermelon’s place* as old *black*-stereotypes, with a soundtrack by Steve Reich based on *Stephen Foster* song. (10)
Edder sounds honestly helpless in the face of his fear - (15)

I’ve been to this venue before. There are many lights, and hoards of people who, no matter the event, will have lined-up to buy hot dogs, beer, fries in thin plastic carriers. An arena surrounded by bright wide aisles. For your enjoyment. You said at this particular show people were smoking in hoards out of each exit. Soon, crowds became more concerned with what they could get away with; looking cool with something that could be smoked in hand, rather than being physically close to what they paid for, the music. The men thought you were hot. He half-smirked, half-drawled out a “hey baby.” You kept walking around and around. Through these never-ending lines, you tried to remove yourself from your body. They knew what they were doing.

* 

The color of your room is a deep red, except in the parts where the blue watercolor paintings hang. 

*a mesmerizing abstract composition of glowing furnaces, sparks, and molten flows* (10)

Also, ocean waves. On the vanity: a myriad of candles, books, week-old mugs. The mirror itself is dusty; who looks in it anymore, except for the pictures of blue stained papers against the red of your wall. Gifts I’d give you every so often.

You turned around after you heard the voice. The one that was talking to you was drunker than the other. “I didn’t even know who they were talking to. But he was looking at me.” They kept getting closer. All you remember is how they were always together, their voices, and tall. 

You never threw any of those paintings away, but silently collected each, kept each.
Lots of those pictures are now ripped at the edges. Though so far the colors have mostly stayed. These pieces would often end abruptly (14)

You began walking away.

* 

Meanwhile, a man within the crowd had seen the whole thing. He did not turn back around, you said. He watched the boy, because he knew it was a bad scene. He saw the whole thing.

* 

**Body Language Decoder**

*He holds a looong, piercing gaze:*

Although you may think he’s smitten, he could be playing you. Holding intense eye contact for more than five seconds doesn’t happen naturally, so he may be using the look as a seduction technique to get you into bed. (1)

On the outside of your peripheral, you saw his friend leaning on a counter, smirking in your direction.

*Dude, she’s not going to go to bed with you.*

**He has a devilish smirk**

*where he raises the right or left side of his closed mouth:*

You’ll have to play hard to get with this boy if you want to hook him. A guy with a grim like this thrives when presented with a bit of a challenge. Catch him if you can. (1)

He had looked at your face. Saw something like naked fear.

**Snapshot #2 The Invisible Person(s) on the Advertisement**

If you look up to your left at the first light, there is a billboard of two young fourteen-year-old looking boys holding red cups and smiling down to something left unseen. Smiling not at each other nor at the viewer, but down. The boys are looking down, at the spectacle. The sign reads **CALL THIS NUMBER**

*IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS EXPERIENCED*
when I’m shaking my hips
look for the
swing (17)

SEXUAL HARRASSMENT.

Both of these models do not look old enough to drive, let alone drink, smoke,
carry a diploma, a child, a girl, a child. Both of their haircuts are exaggeratedly
messy. They look too much like my brother. The one turned facing away the road is wearing a
button-down white shirt, with the first three buttons dramatically undone. The other’s tie is loose,
hair ruffled, smiling in a way that looks like he could be choking; as if his body was trying to laugh
away the shock,

and yet, there he is, standing.

A transfixed, must-see-in-person “flicker” that distills the
cinematic experience to projected light and color patterns, allowing the viewer to become
aware of the electrical-chemical functioning of his own
nervous system. (10)

It took days for me to realize what the sign meant. SAY SOMETHING.

* I was a dancer all along

oh dance
dance, dance, dance
carry a diploma, a child, a girl, a child.

words can never make up for what you do (17)

Somewhere, in the unseen space below the corners of the advertisement, she is
being raped.

Box construction, 10 x 16 3/8 x 3 ¾ in. The Robert Lehman Art Trust. (22)

One has a phone in his hand. Cup in the other hand, cup to face. Wasn’t about to call
anyone. Talk to anyone. This billboard is on Bigelow Blvd on my way to school. CALL THIS
NUMBER. The company was named PEAR something. It sounds so fresh, so innocent, so edible.
Snapshot #3 Shoulder / Her Blue Hands

The light caused the day inside of the bus to become a distorted, shadowy blue. The kind of blue that’s dark yet bright, kind of like how your tongue gets after you suck on a hard candy. Stacy was sitting next to me. She had news. John News. John, the “friend” who, apparently, will not stop persisting. She says she has always been drawn to him, for that kind of charismatic reason. However, for the past few months, She has tried and tried, stopped trying, then tried again to stop seeing him. I know it’s because he makes her feel uncomfortable. The engine puckers, levels as a loud chaos beneath our feet, causing us to hunch, to talk louder. Her blue hands are frantically moving under the light.

How are you and your wife or girlfriend most different?

Rodrigo: My wife has an enormous amount of patience, and she always assumes the best of people, whereas I’m a little more cautious. People come to the house, I ask them for their IDs: “Sure, you’re from Con Edison—show me some ID.”

Jaime: She puts her stock in people a bit more than I do. I’m not going to get my emotions tied up if someone doesn’t come through for me. (12)

Last night John had grabbed her. Would not let her leave his house after she decided not to accept his offer of sleeping over. They are more than friends. Stacy has a boyfriend who knows none of this has happened. The reasoning behind the actions that occurred last night remain vague to me now as I listen to the story. All I know is that John had touched her hard; that she had her fingers on the door knob beforehand. But never ended up going anywhere.

The shards of her blue eyes begin to soften. Her hands are moving fast. Each finger secreted with some sort of consciousness embedded in the bone. On a door in an attempt to leave. Survival mode. She felt that it was getting weird. And then the oncoming hands. He had said no. On the bus, I learn through her hands how it was fear that held her there, which kept her from running out of his house.

Richard: She’s probably more forgiving of other people’s behavior.(12)
Stacy owns her own apartment. And wears the same blue fleece button-up on cold days. Probably to balance the intensity of how she talks, how she looks into you, which at times, leaves me feeling smaller, yet forgiven in some way. Shards of blue. In New York, she learned the map in just three hours, found the hotel, booked our stay, kept us safe, e-mailed the professor all within a matter of hours. He cannot stop thinking about her.

While telling me this, her hands express furiously what her words are unable to show,

Brian: How we handle crises. Professional or personal. I put my head down and barrel through it. She blows it off or forgets about it or runs away from it. (12)
What rushes by us are other students, busses, bikes, red and grey gnashes of color, her hands. Grey grey grey.

female adjective  See feminine  (4)

The sky still has a little gray light. It is the kind of light in which even one’s own hands appear unfamiliar, a stranger’s hands.  (22)

She had said something quietly, something like “no.” Something scared her until she let go of the doorframe, let herself walk unassisted up to his room; letting her body curl up, away.

And now, the undertone of her body suggests she has realized what had happened. Her arms cannot stop expressing, moving.  She had to stay the night.  Did she? It is all she thinks about.

When Stacy is quiet, most of the time it means something. Each paper she types always includes page numbers, a works cited, and a title page; even if the assignment never asked for any of it. She loves to talk about writing, musings on the future, with me for hours. I was left wondering what kind of power that is, to weaken her like that, that way of wanting to find out for herself. Her blue eyes become much more wild as she speaks now.

This new weakness.

fell 1 verb  See cut, drop.
fell 3 noun  See hide  (3)
Maybe he regrets the whole thing. Later he would tell her that he is in love with her. Maybe he has no idea. She has her own bed.

Maybe she yelled and told him no more. I can’t help but nod, and hope so. *A nodding body before waking to consciousness.*

But he draws back my clothes, covers me in a palette of skirts and there is a blouse here; I am less touched. Finally, goodness. (11)

To nod off.

> What did she play with as a child? What did she dream of?

**Snapshot #4 Face**

What a mother says to her son in the car, after he says a swear word to impress his friends:

*Chill out, there’s a girl in the car!*

*Don’t talk like that.*

**Distinctive**

‘I came here because I wanted you to know that I am beginning to understand your purpose.’

‘I don’t understand and probably never shall. I am merely beginning to see part of it.’

Everyone else in the car was just as taken aback, just as embarrassed by his lack of maturity. The girl was the one who said something back.

> ‘Which part?’

(21)

**The Energy Behind the Black & White**

When I was little I played “school” in the basement, with a row of five empty play chairs. A blackboard that never erased right, that was scratchy and hard and very thin; it hung loose on the wall. Because I hated math, I had to make it this “lesson” in order for me to get excited over it.
The only way for me to comprehend: hearing my own voice reading each example problem.

Consciousness: …The ‘I’ can be spoken but not the ‘it’ (23)

But it took some time. The students were always patient. I was always (and still am) terrible at math, these faceless numbers, the black and white of it all.

Aloud, he said, ‘I didn’t seek to talk to you. But you’ve asked for it and you’re going to hear it. To me, there’s only one form of human depravity – the man without a purpose.’ (21)

To hear one’s own voice. A girl in her mom’s high heels. Imagining forms in an otherwise empty room.

**The Shapes & Non-shapes of You**

I learn by talking when I am in the bathroom looking at what is there. Here. He had looked.

& before

a child can

think she

feels it (20)

Said something like, “let’s get drinks, let loose,” and the “you look so fine,” even after I had told him I was with someone. The orange streaks like loud snaps flaring out through the mind, what to say what to say did you just say that oh as if for a second the ground had become slanted.

In a second the body has dissolved, become nowhere. What to say. In the mirror, I am embarrassed by the body.

*

Fingers off the exit, off the knob. In air right before the slap to the cheek, to the forehead.

It’s the differentiation between seeing the body as your own map, as your own source, only to be met by the punch-to- the- stomach realization that this is not the way everyone sees it, you.
Sway.

Did I laugh too hard? Did she stay in his house because she was too startled? Did she ask for it?

His eyes peered down to the stripes of my shirt. A rapidly crashing tide.

Body through the eyes of other.

It’s similar to how one feels after seeing the relative size of Earth compared to Jupiter or Saturn. Seeing outside of one’s own perception. What is there to see, anyway. Apparently, something I cannot control. The remainder in the mirror: a sexual, pink and tan and brown and hair and face, eyes big, loosening like the heavy kind of rain that makes gulping sound as it drips. The body itself becomes the other.

As a way of reassuring myself as myself, I tell my reflection the list for the day. Please:

body as form.

Put priority on inherent energies. Retrace. Please, stay.

Just yesterday, the sky looked so beautiful, now I forget how to look at it right.

Something is missing here.

“Was it what you wanted to do?”

“Well you know – make something of myself, get somewhere.” (21)

Something not on my body. He didn’t see that. How do I?

Run out of the room into openness.

What will you find? What colors, names, faces have you already formed there, in the openness of memory?

Silly, questioning and confused by one’s own reflection.

But after I remember what he said, the lining holding up the memory shatters. All I see is skin.
Morrissey

See!?  

It feels like when you almost walk into something. Like a parking meter. I was looking down, and almost hit it, was inches away, came so close, but I did not. My head jerked up just in time. I sensed there was something there, and quickly got out of the way. It’s the -almost-accident- that -never happened. A sudden terror before the shock of walking away.

The vestibulo-ocular reflex needs to be fast: for clear vision, head movement must be compensated almost immediately... eye movements lag the head movements by less than 10 ms, and thus the vestibulo-ocular reflex is one of the fastest reflexes in the human body. (9)

Because of this survival reflex, you keep walking. It is not that I am incapable of anger, but I succeed on almost all occasions to keep my feelings under control (13)

Body as savior. An unidentified, untouchable way of knowing.

Please say.

FUN SIZE

The candy bar I eat later is FUN SIZE it is no bigger than two bites. It’s fun because it is so small it can fit into my pocket.

small | smôl |  

adjective  
of a size that is less than normal or usual: the room was small and quiet | the small hill that sheltered the house.  
• not great in amount, number, strength, or power: a small amount of money.  
• not fully grown or developed; young: as a small boy, he spent his days either reading or watching TV.  
• used as the first letter of a word that has both a general and a specific use to show that in this case the general use is intended: I meant “catholic” with a small c.  
• insignificant; unimportant: these are small points.  
• (of a voice) lacking strength and confidence: “I’m scared,” she said in a small voice.  
• [ attrib. ] (of a business or its owner) operating on a modest scale: a small farmer.  
• [ archaic ] low or inferior in rank or position; socially undistinguished: at dinner, some of the smaller neighbors were invited.  

small items of clothing, esp. underwear. (8)

This difference makes something once worrisome now guiltless.

small | smôl |  
adverb  
into small pieces: the okra cut up small.  
• in a small size: you shouldn’t write so small. (8)
It’s gone before I know it. *Is this how we must get away with it? By making it small?*

“Operating on a modest scale.”

*Fun here is associated with consuming without feeling the effects.*

As a child, everything had its meanings, its life. Fun meant spending hours giving my playthings names, giving invisible students names. Everything was worth having a face.

What did she say about Frank’s face when they first met? That she knew immediately that he was her type of man from his face *(18)*

I didn’t know that *this* was coming. Hands holding chalk. Fun small size girl you.

Researchers have documented a widespread, magnetic male attraction to a waist-to-hip ratio of .7—the classic hourglass. An eye-tracking study last year found that men start to evaluate a woman’s hourglassness within the first 200 milliseconds of viewing

Names do not have a size or a limit.

Where most of my interest resides…is in the empty space surrounding those crises

I think one of the biggest myths that has been perpetuated by some evolutionary psychologists—though not all—is that there is one ‘man,’ or ‘men,’ with universal behaviors *(12)*

Me too. No one is a type. *What did he play with as a child?*

You cannot take in an individual in two bites. Names or imaginations or voices are not “universal.” Or small. I don’t know the names of the two people who cat-called my closest friend.

I still do not know who they are.

**In- the World**

*Ayn Rand and anger?*

She once said to me, “…If I’m angry at you, it’s because I expect better of you, and … I still respect you. But when that’s gone, without that, when I’m just bored and polite, that’s when you know I’ve lost all interest in you.” *(18)*

People can look at you in this way, but know that it is nowhere actually here, within you. I am not something without a voice, like a spoon, a comb, or a household object. Like wind. *No. As a child this is gross, as an adult it causes you to whisper*
‘You must be a fool, stranger, or come from nowhere
if you really have to ask what land this is.
It’s known the world around,
to all who lives to the east and rising sun
and to all who face the western mists and darkness.
It’s a rugged land, too cramped for driving horses,
but though it’s far from broad, it’s hardly poor.
‘There’s plenty of grain for bread, grapes for wine,
the rains never fail…
there’s stand on stand of timber
and water runs…’ (16)

No, this is not what this is for. Hips, skin, eyes. This land you have only known,
lived in. To say: and water runs… When the body is taken from you, something deeper is
too. There is something childlike about this. Something inborn. Instinctual. Pure. Based solely on
how you are made. This idea of identity. Also, the idea that everything connects; everything could
be a part
of you.

Subjective experience is the most important, for I live here. My own
dreams of naming and creating have caused me to want to say. Every person does this
in some fashion.

The body itself does not only reveal acts of outward identity and survival, but the means for a
voice, an interior experience, a person. A world. Blue worlds on a bus. Or, the voice lives within
the gendered body, though what comes out of it is subjectivity. The way in which we respond. The
mechanics of how I build upon my life. This is not gendered.

one of my students was unsatisfied with the term “fragment” and suggested that we use the term “orb” which would imply something whole and self-contained rather than broken or incomplete. (19)

And so I write in this dust to an empty room, staining my hands in its white
residue, getting the gross taste of it out of my mouth.
John Simons is a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh. He studies in the fiction track of the English Writing major and works at the DePaul School for Hearing and Speech. Don’t bother asking him how his work gets published. He’s just as confused as you are.
“A MEMORIAL TO THE VAINGLORIOUS DEATH BY FIRE OF MY COMRADES ON THE STREETS OF MIDDLE AMERICA DURING THE OUTBREAK”

Brains.

Braaaaaaaaaains.

Braaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaains.

Brains?

BBBBRRRAAAAAAAAAAANNNNNNNNNNNNNNS.

BRAAAAAIINNNS.

BRAINS. BRAINS. Brains. Brains.

Braaaaaaaaaainssssssss. Braaaaaaaaaiiiinnnssssss.


Braaaains.

Brains.
Liz McLaughlin is a writer of fictions and an eraser of poetry from Pittsburgh, PA, USA, Earth. She is a senior at the University of Pittsburgh who at one time must have thought it was a good idea to study Fiction Writing and English Literature simultaneously. Her passions include (but are not limited to) long narratives, flash fiction, urban cycling, grassfed beef, and one rep maxes.
THE ANGEL AT THE TRESTLE

The horror of what happened to Dayvon was not the catalyst.

Rather, my capacity to love changed: diminished at first and then transformed into something so huge and effuse I had to create a new emotion just to contain the joy and sorrow of it. My love for Mark—something that always had permanence—was etched away and replaced by this emotion so newly born and shaking I had to tattoo it onto my body like ink, like there was no way to remember it or read the message without breaking skin and digging down into flesh until blood welled up from beneath. The swelling growth of it stretched my heart muscle to tearing, exploded my tenderness into meaty bits of shrapnel so sharp and sudden I first laughed and then cried out from the pain of it—the sadness of something so imperfect, so essentially fucked as needing another person in such a way.

And after a while, the horror of it wasn’t even horrible. It became obtuse, some mildly annoying thing—like doing dishes or fighting over who’d drive the first leg to Hilton Head or forgetting about daylight savings time and losing an hour of sleep when you have a double shift the next day. It was singular and solid, another normal event in the series of normal events that create life. Sometimes we talked about it. Often we cried or got drunk or clenched fists about it. Eventually we didn’t acknowledge it at all.

However, one thing was certain: we didn’t go to the tracks anymore.

***

It was August. Dayvon, Mark, and I, the great triumvirate.

When we weren’t working, we would fill our backpacks with beer and ride our bikes to the river to lounge on the parked barges that had long ago merged with the shore. We would bake in the summer sun and gulp cans of frothy beer that grew warmer with each passing hour, while we grew less and less concerned with the flavor or the pleasure—
we cared only about the maintenance of the fizz in our heads. One day Dayvon suggested we tie a rope swing to the branch of the strongest oak—the only tree to force its way up and out of the belly of the rusted barge—and so we did. The rest of the month, we took turns climbing to the top of the riverbank just to swing back down again. Just to feel the soaring of our bodies when we let go, to feel the impact—at times as hard as cement—when we hit the water, our feet finding purchase on the silty bottom of the riverbed.

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In early September, the nights got cool and the excitement of the barges and the river and the rope swing waned. The previous winter Mark and Dayvon had started writing—just little tags here and there, throw ups in a runny hand with paint markers on fences and garbage cans, hours spent perfecting tags drawn on stickers with glossy ink. Over the summer, Dayvon started to really get up and began to carry cans of Krylon in his bag, little baggies of fat caps and flare tips. He was forging an identity in spray paint and stencils. He told his story on cement walls and overpasses, the paint running like sweat down the backs of ragged brick buildings, crouching on shaking haunches under shadowy bridges.

He started going bigger. We met at the rail yard, not the river, took turns spotting. A spent September air replaced the yeasty August nights. We weaved in and out and up and around those huge boxcars, climbed the ladders, and sat on top of them. The sound of tossed empty cans echoing our laughter, nights filled with the familiar crunching of gray gravel underfoot.

We had no way to know the trains were tributaries. Arteries that pumped blood away from our hearts. If their beating ceased, our hollows would become cold and empty, the liquid siphoned outward. We didn’t realize the tracks led to an ever-hungering, black, and bloodthirsty night.

Dayvon’s wake was on a Saturday. I spent the afternoon in the basement of the funeral home with Mark, pouring single digit ounces of coffee into tiny paper cups.
Mark drank his coffee black. Dayvon drank his coffee black. All of the men in my life drank their coffee black. Dayvon had got me into it the winter prior. We’d go down to the all-night diner in the wee hours when twilight hands itself to morning and order slices of pie and bottomless ceramic mugs of coffee. Crustcy caramelized pecan, sweet cinnamon apple, creamy pumpkin, sour cherry, foamy lemon meringue. The diner coffee at such an early or such a late hour was dark and thin, hot water dressed in a coffee suit. Dayvon said it was his favorite kind of coffee, much better than the thick-bodied oily sludge everyone loves from cafes. This coffee tastes like the earth, he said. Tastes like dirt, he said, and all things come from the dirt. I nodded. Having some bitter in your life makes the sweets even sweeter.

I had agreed.

Standing at the refreshment table surrounded by the mourning, I poured a steady two-count column of sugar into my coffee and did not stir it.

I handed Mark a paper cup and sat down. He brought the steaming liquid to his face and frowned into it.

“The coffee is weak.”

I shifted my eyes from my black slacked thighs to him. That morning we had begun the construction of a wall bricked solely of obvious statements. We had four solid corners of sentiment built up to about waist deep. We had either forgotten how to talk or simply didn’t know what to say. It wasn’t uncomfortable though—just more quiet. We were almost entirely bricked in.

“But it’s hot and that’s nice,” he added.

I stared down at my hands. They were foreign: skin white like paper, too vascular.

“Yes,” I replied into my cup, into my palms, into the carpet.
I could sense the pleading largeness of his eyes without having to look into his face. I excused myself to use the restroom.

I sat on the toilet in the basement of the funeral home, surrounded by so much gray and beige and quiet. The fluorescent light a steady buzz I felt throughout my body. My slacks gathered taught at the bend of my knees. I leaned my cold arms into the white of my legs, cut the bones of my elbows into the muscles of my thighs.

I was unmistakably alive.

I voided my bladder and was somehow less empty after, the continued function of my body an affront to the cease and desist letter of my mind. I loosened my grip on the wadded ball of tissue in my hand, unfurled it, and smoothed it on my leg. I expected to see the wide loop of his tag or the cramping scrawl blueprint of a new throw up or any one of his characters sketched in blood or ink or paint. I expected something surprising or something foreboding written on the tissue or the palms of my hands or the slate gray of the bathroom stall, but there were only pleats, wrinkled palms, smooth paint—a vast and empty lightness. I folded myself in half, a hard crease down the center, and coughed a dry sob into my knees.

***

When I went back to the lounge, Mark was standing against the wall holding my coffee. He handed it to me and said, “Let’s get out of here.”

I looked straight and solid into his eyes for the first time since the night we heard the news about Dayvon. I drank down my last ounce of coffee. It was cool and thick and sweet and stuck to the back of my teeth like the first letter of his name. Like the words depression and damaged and disaster and deceased.

Mark took me by the hand and led me up the stairs—past what was left of Dayvon, past that whispery room with the closed box like a door
that can never be opened again, past the unintroduced family, the history we didn’t know, the stories we will never be told—right into the blinding white happiness of that early fall day. The glaring blue skies an insolent pronouncement that light always transcends the dark.

Mark and I walked in silence to his place. The October air sang. We reached the building and climbed the stairs to the second story apartment. Before I could even shrug off my jacket he grabbed me by the arms, put his mouth on my mouth. We hadn’t touched in days and the effect of flesh gripping flesh startled me. I did not want to make love or have sex or be fucked, but it had been so many hours, so many days since I had been inside my body. I could see the passion pulse through him—his hands and his mouth and all of the places a human body can press energy—but I felt nothing. He pawed at me out of some desire perhaps to consume me, but his sweetness and anger and frustration and lust just beaded on my hard outer layer and rolled off me into a puddle on the floor underneath us.

I couldn’t feel his softness or skin or the smoothness of his body—only his hardness: a grid, his framework, the skeleton construction of him. His body simply bones and blood and meat. I wasn’t a body any longer—not flesh and bone, but the hollow spaces in between.

Mark worked to quiet his hurting on top of me. On the pile of our faded black clothes. In the pooling of his emotion as it seeped into the hardwood floors. On the foundation the house was built upon, above the soil of the earth just miles away from where we would secrete Dayvon, where he would slip into the dirt to sleep in the cold darkness of the underground. I floated just above this all, just above us both, and marveled at the leanness of my being.

One week after we tipped him back into the earth, I started finding it hard to sleep. And I’d lie there and my swinging mind always settled on

“I wasn’t a body any longer—not flesh and bone, but the hollow space in between.”

McLaughlin
one specific night in October.

That October night opened her door like you open your windows on those fall evenings where the wind is warm and smooth on your skin and you know she is going to close it with the same slamming ferocity you do the next morning when you realize winter had arrived while you slept.

Mark had to work late that night. Dayvon called me around eight-thirty and told me to meet him at the train trestle on the south side of the city. He said he had something to show me. I pulled on my sneakers and threw a few cans of beer into my backpack with a hooded sweatshirt and a hat in case it got cold. I grabbed my black book and a few markers. I had started tracing letters in fat graffiti slang, drawing obtuse characters—cartoon representations of who I thought we were or who I thought we could be. I hadn’t birthed a moniker, couldn’t lift my identity off paper. I couldn’t settle on something so permanent, a single word or phrase or vision to represent me. The world seemed so vast and effortless that without constraints my mind ran like the trains, crisscrossing across the country, traveling seamlessly from one state to another—I felt like everywhere at once and nowhere at all and I couldn’t comprehend how a person could pick just one thing to define themselves wholly. So I brought the sketchpad everywhere I went, kept mining for that single word to define me, that one word to introduce myself to the world.

When I got to the trestle, I leaned my bike against the expanded steel steps and set my bag on the sidewalk. I was fumbling with the mechanism of my chain lock under the orange glow of the sodium-vapor lamps when Dayvon spooked me. He was standing on the sidewalk and I turned and caught him out of the corner of my eye. He was standing there stiff and straight, with a grave look on his face.

I said something like Hey Day or Jesus Christ! or What’s up?—I don’t remember now. It seemed unimportant at the time and probably still is. Now I wonder only because I’m trying to figure out why the mind places emphasis on such things. I remember how tall he was—he was always tall, but this night he was standing so straight—like a soldier at
He stayed silent while I locked my bike and picked my bag up off the sidewalk and pulled out two cans of beer and turned to face him.

I didn’t need hindsight to recall the expression on his face.

Surely I frowned at him and asked what was wrong and in response he shook his head and smiled a small smile. A flitting flash of a thing I could catch between my thumb and forefinger, fold, stuff into that pointless fifth pocket in a pair of jeans if I had the foresight to do such a thing—but I didn’t.

Every seemingly purposeless thing has its place.

When I offered him a beer, he only mumbled something about needing to be sober, about it fuzzing his head, which seemed kind of unlike him but what did I know. I tossed his can back into my bag and popped the tab on mine, tilted it to my lips, let the bubbling warm foaminess coat my tongue.

Dayvon then spoke the name he reserved only for me—let it sing in the air for a moment between us. And then he added, *Come here, I want to show you something.*

He turned and walked under the trestle to the tracks and I followed. As my eyes adjusted to the lack of light, I realized he had rolled the entire cement abutment supporting the trestle bridge above—blanked the canvas completely, covered all the other tags and hollows and simples. The piece was so large to see it all at once I had to cross to the far side of the tracks. The entire thing used at least five colors—must have taken two crates of paint. It was the fucking Sistine Chapel of the Southside.

It wasn’t his usual wildstyle but the letters of the burner popped right off the cement. The 3D was incredible. I started to say, *Day, when the fuck did you get so—*, but then I read the piece. It was a straight, easy to make out the letters. I had been so taken aback by the layout
and execution, I didn’t notice at first what it said, that it wasn’t what he usually wrote.

Outlined in flat white, filled with banner red, highlighted in satin black, true blue, bauhaus gold, the piece exploded into life from the cement.

This is you? I pointed to the piece. When did you—

His face resurrected. I ain’t that person anymore. I just—I can’t.

We spent the rest of the evening sitting on the trestle, talking. He told me about the past few months, the darkness. How he couldn’t figure out what to do with his hands. He poured it all out to me—let it splash off the trestle and onto the tracks.

I asked him if he’d used and he paused before responding but said no. He said No, no, no, but it seems so inevitable. He said, I didn’t know. He said, It’s just so goddamn hard.

I said, I’ll always be here. I wasn’t lying.

We picked apart the hows and whys and wheres and whens. We spent the night alternating between words and long silences, between sitting apart and sitting beside one another, pressing our hands together and pressing our faces against the diamond wire fencing of the trestle. From on the trestle above the tracks we watched the growing white globes, the light of trains as they chugged toward us. We waited for the build.

We spoke, but in stunned anticipation of every single train that passed because it gave us a reason to be silent, to get caught up in the pulsing steel song of the surging tracks just feet below us. The power and speed—the urgency and momentum of locomotion—the swallowing and effort and building and climax spinning in the air all around us. The trestle quaking with the resonance of it, our knees knobby and shaking, the air vibrating in our lungs and making it hard to breathe. We were
on fire with it. We watched every train as it came down upon us and we
turned around and watched each train decrescendo out of our sight and
sound and senses. We watched the train leave the tracks and waited for
the return of the quiet, to fill the air with great clouds of words—our guts
and fears and dreams and hopes and histories. When all of our words
had been spoken and the atmosphere of the trestle had been filled to
overflowing, we simply waited again for another train to come to carry
them away. Our conversations pulled out of our mouths, out of us, out
into the night, out into the city in the slipstream of the escaping trains.

I became overwhelmed with his honesty—the transparency of his
words—the immensity that he had shared this all with me.

But he didn’t share why he told me. Or why he brought me to the
trestle.

He didn’t say why he changed his name. Or tell me how he went
through the entire city and dissed every one his old tags—even the little
ones scribbled on bus stop signs and newspaper boxes. He didn’t let me
know he ghosted all his old pieces, so when Mark and I went to find
them only their shadows remained. He didn’t explain why he buffed
himself from the scene or why he splashed a can of paint over the very
first burner he got props for or why he rolled over the whole-car we
scouted just a month prior.

He certainly didn’t tell me how bad it really was.

Or that he had lost all hope.

Or how when he showed me
his last piece he felt christened—
absolved—forgiven of all future sin.

Or that he was just trying out a way to say goodbye.

***
The conductor said he just stepped onto the tracks.

When the engine was about five-hundred feet out—just walked onto the tracks and turned forty-five degrees to face the barreling bullet of metal hurtling westward, bathed in the growing light of the headlamp, the screaming of brakes that physically could not create enough friction.

The coroner said he had no traces of any drugs, alcohol, illicit substances in his system. He was in the best of health, considering.

The police said really when this happens it is such a tragic thing. The community is saddened by this loss and we are so very sorry—we want to apologize to the people who had to find what was left of the body.

The undertaker said there is simply not a way we can hold an open casket. And don’t you really think it’s better to remember him the way he was then, the way he was the last time you saw him?

***

In the months that followed, our relationship changed. Mark held onto me tighter and with quiet desperation. I maintained our friendship in an attempt to feel anything that might remotely resemble emotion.

Winter had settled into Mark’s apartment and with the closing of the windows, the interior space became unbearable. He wanted nothing more than to spend every moment wrapped within us and I wanted nothing more than to jump out of my skin, or the window, or both.

I began staying at my apartment more often and leaving his place without telling him where I was going or when I planned to return. In the beginning, he questioned me, berated me, argued with me. Eventually he gave up and let me go. I always returned.

Sometimes I would go to the bar on the corner, sip vodka tonics
and watched the patrons come and go. After a while I bored of staying in
one place and started to explore random places throughout the city. Dive
bars and jazz clubs and sports pubs and kitschy college taverns. I loved
the potential—the different types of people who haunted each venue, the
swell of possibility, a chance encounter, the changing atmosphere.

One night I sat in a dusty saloon that proclaimed Thursday to be jazz
night. I listened to the sad coughing of a baritone sax and worked on
my third glass of house red. The woman sitting on the stool next to me
offered a cigarette. I didn’t smoke, but what the hell did I have to lose, so
I took one. When she lit it for me, I got a look at her face and something
clicked inside me. I asked her name.

“Ellie.” She lit hers right after mine without extinguishing the flame.

I don’t know what it was about her.

It might have been the hint of a half-smile, or the dark brown almond-
shaped eyes, or the square jawline. It might have been the sober sadness
mixed with the rejuvenation of sloughing off one’s sins. It might have
been the wine or that first drag of nicotine or the graffiti I stared at on
the train over or that her skin was the exact color of the diner coffee we
used to drink. After a few more jazz sets and cigarettes, another glass of
wine for me and two fingers of whiskey for her, after some knocking of
knees, a few throaty laughs, the way she smiled with her tongue between
her teeth, the was or why ceased to matter. I pinned her to the wall in the
woman’s restroom and tucked my fingers behind her belt and my pressed
my lips to her lips and breathed her in and felt fucking alive again.

***

I built momentum, became unstoppable. After so long living in
shades of gray and black and white, I exploded in color. She reminded
me of Dayvon and yet she wasn’t at all like him. It was like connecting
with him all over again, but not him—someone with just enough of him
to be his sister—it was as if I could do it all over, do it right this time. I
could live tangential to him.
I began going to see her more often, spending more and more time with her, until Mark asked where I had been.

Until she started to ask where I had to always be getting and couldn’t I just stay with her a few nights a week.

I was walking the tracks between two worlds that seemed incapable of existing without each other and yet I seemed incapable of choosing one side of the tracks over the other. So I ignored them both and put it out of my mind until I couldn’t any longer.

***

I left the apartment one afternoon while Mark was at work and rode my bike to the trestle. He had written me a letter that morning, pleading with me to let him in, to let him help, to let him do anything. He proclaimed his love for me. She had left several voicemails asking me where I’d been and why I wasn’t answering and hoping I was alright and dammit just get back to me already before I start calling the hospitals.

It was early January—that time of the year when everything is bright and crisp and frozen, but not so far removed to be the barren deadness of winter. The sun was low but brilliant, the sky an impossible blue. Everything etched with the spidery softness of white frost; the roads veined with salt, the trees outlined in snow.

I hadn’t been to the trestle since that night in October, but when I got there, nothing permanent had changed. The cement and expanded metal and steel beams and rivets and fencing of the scene declared indestruction. At the end of time, when all was lost, only cities would be left. The skeletons of the monoliths we create.

Dayvon’s burner had not gone untouched. New tags cropped up on the edges and at the bottom—the easy places to reach. A three-color piece obscured the first letter. His burner was so huge and so sprawling it invited people to cover it. Something that large creates a clean canvas for others. Graf artists would have left his piece alone for longer perhaps, if
they knew who wrote it, since he had started getting up around the city. But Dayvon had never gone by this name, except for this piece—he never had a chance to get up under this identity. No one knew who it was. No one knew this was Dayvon—the kid who had fallen. That kid who stepped in front of the train.

I reached in my bag and pulled out a can of satin white. I shook the paint and listened to the ball bearing clang around, trapped inside the can. I stuffed the paint into the front pocket of my hooded sweatshirt and climbed the sloping cement of the abutment supporting the trestle. When I got to the top, I had to crawl across the steel rafters under the trestle—shimmy across the expanse, wedged between the cement lip and the steel grid above—to get to right above the center of his piece.

I was terrified of the height, even though it was only maybe fifteen feet. I was terrified of where I’d been the previous four months, of what the future held—terrified to move forward and think backward. But I was not afraid to do what needed to be done.

I edged across the cement using all four of my limbs, crouching like a crab. When I reached the middle of the trestle, I hooked my fingers around the lip of the steel beam and relaxed the rest of my body. The rubber toes of my sneakers applied traction to the cement wall and I was able to release my right hand. I pulled the satin white from my pocket and gave the ball bearing a few cracks for good measure. I began to spray. I painted as far as my arm could reach and then shimmied over to continue the curving sweep. I connected the lines each time, crawling with a curving grace, until I had painted a white halo over the entirety of Dayvon’s name, until I had made him an angel.

I worked my way back down to the ground and crossed the tracks to see the piece as a whole. The fresh paint was stark and obvious next to the newer tags and Dayvon’s piece, which was already beginning to fade into the cement. We can mark this city up as much as we want, but our names are not permanent. Time washes our bones clean.

I heard the metallic singing of a train far down the tracks and placed
my fingers on the cold silver metal to feel the vibrations tingle through my skin. Looking eastward, I could just make out the almost imperceptible glowing star of an engine as it barreled down the tributary—toward the city—toward the hollow where my heart used to be.
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adream **awake**

behind eyegauze woven with a tracery of veins, haunted by merry delusions—

pry gauze I gaze vainly.
beyond me is diluted.

beyond: **me.**

luminous creatures blossom into silkwhite sweet
clocks tick mischief till shivertimber spindles unfurl and squirrels requarrel in the thaw

mooncrust slivers and crickets’ whinings creeks and their findings, earth, dusty, creaks to ravines, ravenous for tumbled goats. song

of all that is unraveling **my.**
and all that is winding. **mine.**

and all iswas not lost all is self lust, all else is curdled.
pre-cradle and mother’s milk. gravity – the familiar burden, post-grave – there are stillbirds in an earth without mysoul.

(ravens)

(go try, it’s divine.) (grown tired of I.)
Mount Auburn Cemetery, that latticework of frayed nerves, curves to conceal us from the conversations of sidewalks and storefronts. Its paths unfurl slowly, in looping curls, which we follow quietly — the only way that two sore thumbs, one a few feet taller than the other, can respectfully rove among the eternally horizontal.

Of course, I don’t know that. I am eight and still a child enough to hold my dad’s hand and test the strange soles of his thumbs, split from claw hammer banjo. I twang:

“Whatcha want for your birthday?” To read his reply, I have to raise my earnest chin.

“Your boring old dad, he wants what he always wants: one cryptic haiku.” Five, seven, five: the numbers above his initials on a telephone, the raw ingredients of his predictable passwords. Gold, green, gold: the color of his grandmother’s name (Eva), Catholicism, frothy fields dyed by an automobile’s mournful dirge.

“How’bout this one?” Withered stalks and husks encrust one stone. The crooked grave reads: Jack Straw, 1895 – 1957, Wichita.

He hems, “Wichita eh, how’d he get out here? You go first.” This is our best game. I make a tale for the late Jack-be-nimble, but of course his is better, thanks to a thousand afternoon naps in front of prison movie reruns. Jumped the watchman, right outside the fence, took his rings, four bucks in change...

A plane splits the sky, slices the fabric of our game. The air is crisp, surprisingly so for September, and my apple-flesh lungs grapple with the chill to no avail.

No, there are no planes; it is September 14th, 2001. Three days earlier, my dad’s old college roommate (one of two, both Irish, both named Brian), a priest at Saint Paul’s Chapel, emerged safely; a sycamore in the chapel’s courtyard shielded his two-hundred-forty-five-year-old church from falling debris.
“Werntch’ya scared about Brian when those towers got hit?”

“Not really. I knew he’d be okay.”

“How?”

“I just had a feeling.” Hear the preacher and the baying of his hounds. The cemetery’s tendrils pull us along. Rusted signs crusty with faded white lettering (Althea Way, Daphne Lane) punctuate the path; black bubbles cling to the branches of trees. We weave evenly, each trip rightward (hem) balanced at the fork with a turn back to the left (haw). Snot crusts on my green fleece sleeve. Too young to savor silence I continue in my quest to impress:

“Did’ya know, Dad, that people dream because their brains wanna use up all the extra information they take in during the day?”

“No, I did not.” That paternal sing-song.

“It’s true, I swear, I read it in Reader’s Digest. That’s why dreams predict the future sometimes. All that extra information we usually ignore is like little baby hints, y’know? And dreams turn it into scenes that actually happen.” I raise my head to see his smug head bobbing, could be, could be, owl in a tree. Six foot seven, the leggy man. Dubbed Tree as a kid to distinguish him from the other three Roberts; together they formed The Four Bobbys, Malvern Elementary’s singing quartet.

The path bows below a willow and an ice cream truck’s tune (Pop Goes The Weasel) sours as it’s pulled farther away. Ten years pass. Autumn. The black drains from my father’s hair when his age exceeds that of Paul, his father, my unknown Pop (viewed in sepia tone only, through an upturned sherry glass of amber whiskey, shrouded in smoke). The second Bobby becomes a Barbara. In Kansas, Jack’s daughter, dressed in blue, untangles a soggy scarlet begonia from her hair. Brian Shaughnessy stays put, worships that God. Brian Donnelly joins a cult in Florida, leaves after a year of oranges and weed, works for the post-office, adheres to conspiracy theories, fears The Man. The school bully gets pregnant at seventeen. My dad’s Irish twins each divorce. Only his youngest sibling, sweet cleft-palated Patrick, left-handed, left-leaning, who cared for Lucy the dog after no one else would, finds love with an
opera singer who looks just like him. Together they raise Eddy, a mentally challenged sixty year old with a flipper for an arm and a thing for blondes. I find my watch in the closet downstairs. My dad predicts all this.

The spiderless dream catcher holds only dust; my dad dreams not. All observed, there are no subtle details left to dream. He wakes at five every morning, the black stalks of hair on his neck froth frigid; he knows full well what is to come. A car shivers as it glides along the undulating landscape, cracks the ice from its spine. But some prophecies remain in crystal, uncracked:

Despite his nagging, why're you reading in the dark? I am not blind yet.
Kaeli Hood is a senior at the University of Pittsburgh studying poetry and English literature. She started as a literature major, but over the course of her studies she found true love in the form of poetry. Her poetry is informed by her lit-crit background, especially semiotics, and her literary criticism is often informed by the everything-falling-together gut feeling of poetry.
MIDDLING CULTURE: THE MIDDLEBROW, THE PULITZER, AND DEVOTION TO THE NEGATIVE

On April 9, 2003, Jeffrey Eugenides received the Pulitzer Prize for best American fiction. The Pulitzer Prize Committee released a statement that said of the novel: “Spanning eight decades - and one unusually awkward adolescence - Jeffrey Eugenides’s long-awaited second novel is a grand, utterly original fable of crossed bloodlines, the intricacies of gender, and the deep, untidy promptings of desire.”

Prizes like the Pulitzer and its ideological parent the Nobel emerged as methods of awarding value to – or perhaps identifying the intrinsic value of – literary works. Pierre Bourdieu, in his seminal work Outline of a Theory of Practice, describes this value in economic terms, suggesting that we must “extend economic calculation to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular formation – which may be ‘fair words’ or smiles, handshakes or shrugs, compliments or attention, challenges or insults, honour or honours, powers or pleasures, gossip or scientific information, distinction or distinctions, etc.” These economic terms speak well to standard prize “transactions,” where an author receives, for an individual work or body of works, the praise of any of several prize-giving institutions. This praise typically comes in the form of both a financial and social endorsement, and in some ways serves as a modern-day patronage system, although grounded more in capitalism than the original patronage systems. The praise of a prize committee lends a work and its author a sort of “cultural capital” that works in a way similar to credit in the system of cultural exchange. The cultural capital afforded by a prize has been intended to confer a value status; it serves as a recognition of High art.

Alfred Nobel’s will explicitly states the literature portion of his prize should be awarded “to the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction,” dictating that his committee should select an author with a mind toward social growth. This, predictably, has been interpreted, reinterpreted, and misin-
The Nobel website itself describes the numerous periods of its prize’s social focuses as, in order, “A lofty and sound idealism,” “A policy of neutrality,” “The great style,” “Universal Interest,” “The Pioneers,” “Attention to Unknown Masters,” and “The Literature of the Whole World.” Each described era has an identifiable set of staunch social priorities, and the Nobel committee seems to be aware of this in a consciously near-playful way. The titles for each era become increasingly focused on discovering undiscovered or overlooked artists and bringing them to light, combining “Attention to Unknown Masters” and “The Literature of the Whole World” as a way for the Nobel committee to participate in a cultural globalization to match the pre-existing financial globalization.

This system of prize-giving, endowed with heavy (if questionable) globalized social implications, relies heavily on Antonio Gramsci’s social notion of hegemony, by which the majority of any population gives their consent to “the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.”

It’s important to pause here and note that Gramsci acknowledges that “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals,” and proceeds to note: “Thus, because it can happen that everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor.” So, the members of this socially dominant group enjoy the title of “intellectual” and its inherent respect. These intellectuals are capable – through this hegemonic consent to the recognition of their prestige – of influencing (perhaps even creating) the taste of their nation, and perhaps even, in cases like the Nobel, a Global taste.

**Globalization: Financial and Cultural**

Globalization is the term given to the modern emerging global financial economy, and thus, by extension, the emergent global cultural
economy. Along with participation in the global economy, the advent of Globalization brought about a desire to participate in an almost re-combinant sense of “Global” culture. Pascale Casanova, in *The World Republic of Letters*, describes the origins of this Global taste. She begins by citing Paul Valéry’s “La liberté de l’esprit,” which makes a similar argument to Bourdieu’s *Distinction*, relating culture to money and suggesting a sort of cultural capital. Casanova goes on,

> “Extending Valéry’s line of thought to apply more precisely to the specific economy of the world of letters, one may describe the competition in which writers are engaged as a set of transactions involving a commodity that is peculiar to international literary space, a good that is demanded and accepted by everyone – a form of capital that Valéry called “Culture” or Civilization,” which includes literary capital as well.” ⁷

In his essay, “The University, The Universe, The World, and ‘Globalization’,” Masao Miyoshi suggests that “globalization” is “By now a thoroughly overused but still abused term, [yet it] was a ‘new’ development… striking some as a hopeful consequence of the end of the Cold War. Believers celebrated it as a true cosmopolitanism, worldwide prosperity, utopia.” ⁸ This certainly sounds like Nobel’s “work in an ideal direction.”

This desire for cultural globalization in some ways comes from an urge to lay claim to some of the cultural capital associated with finding the “Unknown Masters” of literature: the hegemonic structure of prize-giving is self-enforcing in that the credence to award prizes only grows with each prize given. Awarding renown, especially among a slew of other prizes, can only increase the prestige of the institution: “The ambition of the newer prize, rather, is to situate itself in a relationship of marked, and possibly antagonistic, complementarity to the dominant one, establishing its own apparent necessity by reference to some failing or lack in its more esteemed predecessor.” ⁹

With this desire for cultural globalization comes the Nobel Committee’s recognition of Gabriel García Márquez’s heavily South American novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The Nobel committee quite open-
ly awarded the Nobel to García Márquez as a sort of stand-in for South American culture at large: “Many impulses and traditions cross each other… influences from European surrealism and other modernism are blended into a spiced and life-giving brew from which García Márquez and other Spanish-American writers derive material and inspiration.”

The Nobel Committee became the “first” to recognize talent in a far-off, exotic part of the world.

Here lies a certain Orientalism (or perhaps a Global-South-ism) not unlike that described in Edward Said’s book of the same name in this global seizing of cultural capital. By recognizing “Unknown Masters,” the Nobel committee becomes, in a way, their representative. Said describes this concept of representation: “The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and faute de mieux, for the poor Orient.”

The term Orient may be out of favor:

“The phrase ‘Global South’ refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including ‘Third World’ and ‘Periphery,’ that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized. The use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power.”

Here, the term Orientalism stands for a sort of focus on drawing attention to representations of “less fortunate” cultures (the Global South rather than just Eastern cultures) for personal gain. These privileged, distinguished intellectuals composing the Nobel committee have controlled via recognition what’s been socially recognized as “work in an ideal direction” at any given time. In recent times, these social obligations have moved toward a more global view, which leads to a new brand of Orientalism. How does this all relate to Middlesex and its Pulitzer?

Middling Culture

Middlesex, as previously stated, is an example of Pulitzer Prize-winning fiction. It is an example of an attempt (arguably either successful
or unsuccessful) at global recognition in that its first-generation characters originate from Greece and struggle their way to America. It is a novel that spans approximately eighty years. The Pulitzer’s citation for Eugenides’ prize cites the jacket of the book, published by Farrar: “Spanning eight decades – and one unusually awkward adolescence – Jeffrey Eugenides’s long-awaited second novel is a grand, utterly original fable of crossed bloodlines, the intricacies of gender, and the deep, untidy promptings of desire. It marks the fulfillment of a huge talent, from a writer singled out by both *Granta* and *The New Yorker* as one of America’s best young novelists.”

The Pulitzer’s literary prizes, dubbed its “Prizes In Letters,” are presented among a wide array of journalistic prizes. The six categories of Letter prizes are genre-based: fiction, play, historical nonfiction, auto/biography, verse, and nonfiction “not eligible for consideration in any other category.” The requirements are simple: an American author or publisher submits a book “first published in the United States during the [past year] and made available in hardcover or bound paperback form for purchase by the general public.” The Pulitzer Prizes are self-described as “the country’s most prestigious awards and as the most sought-after accolades in journalism, letters, and music.” So, the Pulitzer committee is aware of its prestige, and thus its ability to endow works with cultural capital.

However, there can be found no formal recognition of a “type” of work that wins the Pulitzer – the closest the site comes to such is an acknowledgement of the prize’s movement away from conservatism in “matters of taste”:

“In letters, the board has grown less conservative over the years in matters of taste. In 1963 the drama jury nominated Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, but the board found the script insufficiently “uplifting,” a complaint that related to arguments over sexual permissiveness and rough dialogue. In 1993 the prize went to Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches*, a play that dealt...
with problems of homosexuality and AIDS and whose script was replete with obscenities. On the same debated issue of taste, the board in 1941 denied the fiction prize to Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but gave him the award in 1953 for *The Old Man and the Sea*, a lesser work.”

The notion of “matters of taste” here speaks to the idea that some art possesses more cultural capital than others.

Dwight Macdonald’s 1960 essay “Masscult & Midcult” delineates a distinction between Mass culture (masscult: pop culture, kitsch) and High culture (highcult: avant-garde modernism, “true art”). Using Bourdieu’s terminology, Masscult has a very low amount of cultural capital, but achieves a high volume of transaction with actual capital, while High Culture has a high amount of cultural capital and may or may not achieve successful capital status. Macdonald sets aside a third category: Midcult, the “bastard” of Masscult. Since its inception, Midcult has been the subject of much criticism. Macdonald very apparently has no respect for it, and many others would agree. Virginia Woolf once threatened, in a letter written but never sent to the Editor of the *New Statesman*, “If any human being, man, woman, dog, cat or half-crushed worm dares call me ‘middlebrow’ I will take my pen and stab him, dead.” William Deresiewicz, in his essay “Upper Middle Brow,” similarly condemns poor midcult: “Midcult is Masscult masquerading as art: slick and predictable but varnished with ersatz seriousness… peddling uplift in the guise of big ideas.”

As champions of journalism, the Pulitzer Prizes are criticized as part of this nigh-universally loathed “Midcult,” or middlebrow culture. “Objectively, the journalist dwells squarely in middlebrowland, a reasonably literate writer describing assorted lowbrow happenings: car thefts, politicians’ poses, presidential foibles, felonies and misdemeanors, weddings, home runs, and bicycle races.” Similarly, the idea that the middlebrow is “peddling uplift in the guise of big ideas” situates the Pulitzer, with its eye toward literature that is “sufficiently uplifting,” comfortably in the middlebrow.

Deresiewicz goes on to list some examples of the Midcult of today: *Tree of Life*, Steven Spielberg, Jonathan Safran Froer… *Middlesex.*
Thus, the inescapable: the Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, the novel that so many enjoyed, praised, and purchased so thoroughly – it is inescapably middlebrow.

As an alternative to this despicable Midcult, Deresiewicz describes a glorious-sounding new category: the upper middlebrow. He describes this as “infinitely subtler than Midcult. It is post- rather than pre-ironic, its sentimentality hidden by a veil of cool. It is edgy, clever, knowing, stylish, and formally inventive… and the films that should have won the Oscars.” This, to me, is an extremely tenuous assertion. It seems to come from an urge to avoid simplistically accepting the hegemony of high culture but also an urge to avoid dipping down into a sense of diminishing cultural capital. It stems mostly, it would seem, from the fact that Macdonald has already condescended to the category of Middlebrow, and therefore it has become to him a culturally bankrupt institution.

I would like to suggest that the critical condescension to the Middlebrow is symptomatic of a larger corruption in the economy of prestige, a corruption based on an increasing need for consumers of culture to be at the forefront of taste formation. Macy Halford suggests that there is a shift to accessibility of high-art, using Harper’s and The New Yorker as examples: “both magazines are devoted to the high but also to making it accessible to many; to bringing ideas that might remain trapped in ivory towers and academic books, or in high-art scenes, into the pages of a relatively inexpensive periodical that can be bought at bookstores and newsstands across the country (and now on the Internet).” Halford’s argument is that this Highcult mentality with Masscult availability is the heart of the Middlebrow.

The Internet is absolutely the primary player in this mass availability of high-cult ideas; Kutler says that “The Internet presents a growing obstacle to any individual, institution, or medium attempting to influence the public’s cultural tastes. It is giving voices to millions of individuals, and provides a platform for every imaginable cultural offering… Internet users are challenged to develop their own cultural standards, whether high, low, or that comfortable old friend: middlebrow.”

When the Middlebrow is viewed through this less demonizing view, based on physical accessibility rather than intellectual accessibility, it
becomes perhaps more palatable to institutions of High culture.

**The Prize Game’s Diminishing Returns**

In the beginning, prizes developed as a way to confer distinction upon both the prized work and the prizegiving institution. This distinction was a mechanism by which valuable works of art and literature would become more accessible where they may not have before. However, in an age where the Internet is prevalent, the accessibility aspect of prized literature is a vestigial organ. This is, of course, not to say that accessibility to prized literature is entirely extinct. There are certainly still “Unknown Masters” to be discovered, and prize committees are indeed searching for them. However, this search is in itself quite corrupted, both in its new-Orientalism and its self-serving proliferation of prestige: it can be trusted neither to bring forth truly unknown works nor truly artistically masterful works.

When increased accessibility is removed from the Prize Game, what is left? The proliferation of prizegivers’ prestige. In *The Economy of Prestige*, James English details a number of “Strategies of Condescension” and “Styles of Play” used by the Prize Game. Among these strategies are a great many that can be employed by those receiving or not receiving prizes, including refusal of prizes (a strategy employed by Sartre) and asking for prizes (Toni Morrison). These new strategizing contrivances to the Prize Game embody a lot of frustration and mistrust, among which is Deresiewicz’s concept of an Upper Middle Brow made up of “films that *should* have won the Oscars.” In a way, because the corruption and condescension of the Prize Game has been recognized and openly addressed, Gramsci’s idea that not everybody performs the function of an intellectual has become outdated. The same men who are not, as Gramsci has said, cooks and tailors, are doing the work of intellectual distinction. The act of differentiation, of proliferation of distinction, is no longer a simple transaction. Deresiewicz craves genuine, subtle, post-ironic art, works that do not present the facade of cultural
capital. He sees a disparity between the rise of this more genuine literature and its social capital. For lack of a better term, I will refer to a work’s status as genuine as its genuity. There is a new absence of genuity in the game that is almost infectious – a rapid growth of cultural capital has in effect escaped the gold standard of increased accessibility.

The Midcult as Respite

At the heart of this intellectual analysis of the prize is this insurmountable contradiction: the Prize Game has become a petty game, a prestige-mill. However, our salvation may come from an unlikely place: the “insidious” Midcult. This hybrid of cultural and physical capital, which “sells” but also maintains a sense of at least a minor ideological responsibility, seems to me the closest to a genuine conferring of prestige that literary culture has come. Consider it: the Midcult is where people earnestly invest their money and where they are the most emotionally affected; “uplift” is not a bad thing. There is an organic and visceral reaction to the Midcult that is not by necessity present in Masscult and High Cult, and it diametrically opposes the detached transaction of cultural prize-giving institutions.

English says,

“The prestige of a prize – the collective belief in its cultural value – depends not just on the prestige of the jurors, the scale of their cultural portfolios, but on their own apparent belief in the prize, their willingness to invest in it personally… If their belief is seen as feigned and cynical, if their interest in the prize is perceived as having been bought, then the whole virtuous circle is imperiled.”

The idea that the value of a prize is in the collective belief in its genuity, at least in financial terms, is an important one. However, if we are taking prestige, as Bourdieu wishes, to bear resemblance to a system of currency, then prize committees’ genuity should also be important in terms of their base level of prestige. I would like to contend that the higher interests of the Nobel committee, including globalization and the proliferation of its own prestige, makes the prize “feigned and cynical,” to use English’s terms.

Multigenerational Narrative Across the Highcult/Midcult Divide
I received more joy, more natural pleasure, from the middlebrow *Middlesex* than I did from the Highcult *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The multigenerational narrative in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was wrapped up in a great amount of difficulty. Between the muddled temporality of the narrative, the confusing gesture of naming several generations of characters with the same name, and the metafictional move at its end, there was a great barrier to my understanding of and connection with the book. This difficulty registers as inaccessibility, which is an easy way to feign prestige; in terms of differentiation, having been one of “the few” to slog through a certain read works to proliferate prestige as if it were, itself, a prize. There is a certain sunk cost fallacy to a difficult read – one becomes inherently more invested in something that they have spent a large chunk of time reading.

This is, of course, not to say that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not a work of literature worth being prized. It is a fantastic work of magical realism with vibrant, vivid characters. It has a lot to “say.” However, and García Marquéz acknowledges this in his Nobel citation, it was chosen as a representative of a larger culture, a member of the Global South: “Eleven years ago, the Chilean Pablo Neruda… enlightened this audience with his word. Since then, the Europeans of good will – and sometimes those of bad, as well – have been struck, with even greater force, by the unearthly tidings of Latin America, that boundless realm of haunted men and historic women, whose unending obstinacy blurs into legend.”

*Middlesex* did not have the same difficulty of reading that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had. Its multigenerational narrative was sewn together with the present narrative thread of Calliope Stephanides, the primary character and dead end for the Stephanides family. Because the narrative was “easier,” more accessible than stories like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it is relegated to the shelf of “Middlebrow” by discerning intellectuals like Merton Lee, who wrote an article devoted to explaining “Why Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex* is so Inoffensive.” The idea that offensiveness is necessary for a work to be successful goes back to the idea of politics of difficulty: Kafka says in a letter to Oskar Pollak that “we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book we are reading doesn’t shake us awake like a blow to the skull,
why bother reading it in the first place? So that it can make us happy, as you put it? Good God, we’d be just as happy if we had no books at all; books that make us happy we could, in a pinch, also write ourselves.” 28 Lee, however, says that “Middlesex is inoffensive, but only because to be offensive requires commitment to the negative.” 29

This is also not to say that it is entirely unproblematic for the Pulitzer to be so blindly focused on American literature. There is very obviously a number of benefits to understanding the literature of the “Whole World,” including a general sense of awareness as well as the enlarging of one’s worldview. However, the obstinacy with which prize institutions stick to their metaphorical guns in their Globalism and the politics of their proliferation of prestige take away some of the legitimacy with which their awards are given.

I’d like, then, to suggest that more prizes should attempt to emulate the “middlebrow” Pulitzer. Its genuity, evidenced by its system of self-entry and unabashed interest in uplift, is commendable. Its resistance to the notion of Globalism, to this new brand of Orientalism based in the Global South, makes it less contrived, less “feigned and cynical,” less “devoted to the negative.”
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AN ERA OF VOLATILE TRANSITION:
UNCOVERING THE HINDU-MUSLIM TENSION IN MUMBAI, INDIA

Introduction

“If this city is to move forward into a less communally tense and more promising future, then it seems that only God can help us reach there.”¹ This insight from one of Mumbai journalist Sandeep Unnithan’s numerous city-wide interviews ironically sheds light on a rather most talked-about and touchy subject within one of India’s most rapidly growing hubs today. The consistent problem of inter-religious tensions (Hindu-Muslim) within Mumbai seems to be at the discussion table for practically every urban planner, elected official, police officer, philanthropist, and even common citizen who convenes to address the city’s progress. With a metropolis population of just under 20.5 million², Mumbai has emerged as the fourth most populous city in the world and is one of the most densely populated. More illustratively, the size of the Muslim minority within the total population of the city is around 18.6%, while Hindus represent around 67.4% of the inhabitants. The religious cleavage is thus supported by a social and civil disparity within the population of Mumbai itself, which makes addressing the Hindu-Muslim strife all the more challenging. With numerous, overwhelmingly promising statistics—at least in the areas of infrastructure and economic development—one thus finds it hard to believe that problems such as inter-religious tensions are shrouded in the highly visible success of the city within the last two decades. Yet, this pressing issue continues to persist, and many scholars believe this conflict serves as a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to Mumbai’s continued urban progress.

Interestingly, recent literature on the subject has cited a plethora of causalities for this communal volatility: economic strife, political corruption, ethno-cultural differences, and even generic ideological disparities.³ Superficially, these elements seem potent, but nevertheless there seems to be an underlying factor that describes the current Hindu-Muslim volatility within Mumbai. This brings in the discussion
of the effects of modernist-postmodernist ideologies on the communal tensions, which is essentially the driving force behind this analysis. Modernist theory essentially denotes the modern development of industrial societies, and the rapid growth of cities, with many elements overlapping the concepts of Westernization, urban comprehensiveness (i.e. standardized application), and widespread disregard of resident or public opinion. Postmodernism, by definition, rejects modernism in that it advances diversity within the urban environment, heightens the awareness of social differences, and deconstructs the uniform applicability of planning that modernists once posited. The paper will thus argue that the ongoing, communal volatility between Hindus and Muslims within the city of Mumbai is a direct side effect of the current transition from a modern to postmodern urban environment, which is best illustrated by the tangible socio-economic differences between both religious groups.

**Methodology**

I will first briefly employ a historical lens to analyze the specific effects of modernism on the city, specifically during the 1990s, which saw the worst of the inter-religious tensions. Modernist ideas here include the creation of a master plan for the city that was spearheaded by a central authority, as well as the idea that such a form of urban planning can provide the greatest good for the most amount of people. The period that followed, 21st century Mumbai, will be the main section of my analysis, as the various postmodern elements and their side effects that have been adapted to the prevailing modernist ideology are discussed. The driving example here will be what I find as a reinvention of indigenous (historically important) aesthetics into the urban environment of the city, as well as Mumbai’s central desire to address the needs of the various groups living within the urban area. Here I argue that the specific socio-economic cleavages which emerged from this transitional phase help to illustrate how this shift in ideology contributes to inter-religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Because the transition between modernism and postmodernism inevitably establishes a Hindu superiority over the Muslim population, tensions result, which creates an “inherently vicious cycle within the urban atmosphere of the city.” Connecting to this discussion, the last section of the paper will very briefly focus on the future of the city in terms of its physical, social, and civil progress amidst such ideological transitions as well as deep inter-religious strife. Thus, by
analyzing this specific side effect of the transitional phase of Mumbai’s current urban environment, I believe that one can better understand the paramount obstacle that lies in the path of the city’s overall progress.

**Essential Information and Terminology**

An analysis of the rather complex issues involved in the Hindu-Muslim tension within Mumbai warrants a prior understanding of the social, civil, and economic features of the city as well as more detailed definitions of the applicative models of modernism, the modern-postmodern transition, and postmodernism. The demographics of the city, including both the ethno-religious and socio-economic elements that define the urban environment, help to shed light on the basic issues which surfaced long before the modern-postmodern transition began to affect the city. Mumbai currently ranks in the top ten internationally for both population and population density, as the urban hub houses just under 20.5 million people over an area of 16,851.5 square miles, leading to an astonishing 53,600 people per square mile. In other words, Mumbai represents itself as an urban area in which individuals are in close contact with one another at any given time. As mentioned before, demographically the city is about 67.4% Hindu, 18.6% Muslim, and 14% Buddhist, Christian, Sikh, and other minorities. Thus, the largest ethno-religious minority within the urban fabric is the Islamic population which resides in the city. Linguistically, the city represents an indigenous vibe that also lends a hand to the underlying communal tensions, as the official language has always been Marathi, the state language of Maharashtra (of which Mumbai is the capital). Because of the racial and ethnic diversity throughout the urban area, the unofficial languages are Hindi, Urdu, and English, which are essentially trademarks of other large Indian cities. Unemployment stands at 14%, while over 60% of the urban population resides in the numerous slums dotting Mumbai. The literacy rate within the hundreds of slum and slum-like dwellings is over 69%, making them the most literate in India. Interestingly, over 70% of the Muslim population residing in the city lives within these urban slums, which negatively contributes to the modern-postmodern effects on the communal tension within the area. For the purposes of nomenclature, those who live in or are originally from Mumbai are known as “Mumbaikars,” while those who live in or are originally from the state of Maharashtra are known as “Maharashtrans.” Such terms will frequently arise in this analysis and
thus familiarity with both will help with the understanding of their context. Less specifically, Mumbai has been categorized as a “world city,” where a multitude of races, religions, ethnicities, and cultures collide, allowing for a uniquely diverse urban fabric. Information technology companies, large banks, family owned restaurants, world-class shopping malls, and a plethora of temples, mosques, and even museums are just some of the sites that dot the city, allowing for a truly inclusive environment both socio-civilly and economically. Thus, at the ground level, the infrastructure of Mumbai seems much like any other urban megalopolis. But at a deeper level, the works of modernism and postmodernism are certainly showing their true colors.

It is also important to mention that there exist numerous preexisting conditions surrounding the ongoing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, many of which are pan-Indian issues. Since the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, relations between the sub-continents have faced numerous sour patches. With the ongoing military and political stalemate in the conflicted Kashmir region of North India and the influx of Muslim refugees from both Bangladesh and Burma, the interreligious strife is built around the constructed notions of political and social domination within the Indian society. Four wars have been fought between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), and with communal tensions taking the form of protests and even riots, the Hindu-Muslim relationships are also a question of national identity and loyalty to one’s homeland. It is also interesting to note that differences do exist among various age groups and socioeconomic sectors of the both the Hindu and Muslim populations within India. In most cases, mutual tolerance is apparent and potently influential in each group’s socio-cultural development. Nevertheless, Mumbai, which has arguably seen the worst side of Hindu-Muslim strife, continues to face the challenges of this interreligious clash, which can be attributed to the transition between modern and postmodern urbanism.

But what exactly are the applicative elements of modernism and postmodernism directly related to the specifics of Mumbai’s communal ten-
sion? For the sake of this analysis, modernism includes two vital points: the establishment of a master plan which includes a central authority of some kind, and the principle that the greatest good must be done for the greatest number of individuals. Both of these elements of modernism are intrinsically woven into the section of this paper which focuses on the beginnings of the communal tension, or the time period between 1985 and 2001. This phase serves as the basis for the current urban turmoil within Mumbai, as it weaves both of these principal modernist elements into Mumbai’s urban routine. The postmodernist elements that apply to the argument then include: an administrative focus that addresses the issues of the marginalized groups, and the reintroduction and solidification of indigenous aesthetics into the urban environment. Here, the Muslim population serves as the marginalized or oppressed group, while the various infrastructural elements help to “relay social, cultural, and ethno-religious traditions that are of historical importance to the city.” Thus, the transitional phase or the modern-postmodern period is essentially the clash of the two modern and two postmodern elements, which is what allows the conditions surrounding communal tension between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai to rapidly deteriorate.

Theoretically, a final idea that also helps to better understand the fundamental issues which characterize the religious volatility within Mumbai are the three urban elements proposed by Joel Kotkin in *The City: A Global History*, which he argues should be inherent in any city. He proposes that the urban environment of the city should include: “a sense of sacredness, the ability to provide security, and the animating role of commerce.” These three ideas are also interwoven into the discussion of Mumbai’s communal tension, as questions such as “What does it mean to be a Mumbaikar?,” “Is Mumbai truly a secure city?,” and “What is the threshold for the commercial prosperity of the city?,” are all analyzed. Including such elements from Kotkin’s thesis allow us to truly understand the Hindu-Muslim volatility from all angles. These three fundamental ideas provide for a more thorough understanding of the origins, ongoing problems, and even future projections of the communal way of life within Mumbai. Thus, with such parameters set in place, one can better understand the following section of this analysis, in which the specific effects of modernism on the city will be discussed. Through this historical lens, a foundation will be set that will ultimately
shed light on the origins of the modern-postmodern transition of the city, and its ultimate effects on the communal tension within Mumbai.


The source of the Hindu-Muslim communal tension within Mumbai dates back to a period in its urban history that was fueled by the enveloping force of modernism, which essentially set the foundation for the turbulent transitional period that would soon follow. The political, socio-civil, and economic infrastructure was built around the two core elements that the modernist school forwards: a master plan which includes a central authority, and the idea that the greatest good must be done for the greatest number of people. An individual who many people even today believe “transformed the city for better or for worse” dominated this specific point in history. The man behind such an urban revolution was Bal Thackeray, a politician, activist, and for some, a reincarnation of “a savior who would fight for Mumbaikars and Maharashtras until his dying day.”

Bal Thackeray represented a unique and highly effective method of urban restructuring that dated back to the 1947 Partition, in which the republic split into three separate political entities: Pakistan, East Pakistan, and India. His role essentially came into the limelight during the years following the ethno-religious turbulence of the post-World War II era in Mumbai. However, for the purposes of this analysis, the period between 1985 and 2001 serves as the most important phase in his career. Thackeray, until his death in 2012, was the leader and president of his self-founded political party, Shiv Sena. His presence garnered millions of followers across the urban area, and the majority of his supporters considered him to be “a divine figure” who watched over the city. Shiv Sena developed its principal pillars around two main goals that essentially upended the existing infrastructure and replaced it with a modernist approach.

First, it proposed the establishment of a citywide plan that would reorganize the urban core of the city through “an extremely nationalistic social, civil and economic centralization.” Effectively, at the center of this plan was Bal Thackeray, who served as a parallel government within Mumbai. Thackeray was the leader of this extremist movement that kept
every politician, police officer, and administrative official in check by essentially establishing himself as the city’s chief. His modernist master plan consisted of an extremist policy that essentially banned any Muslim from participating in the urban way of life. Thus, this population could not start businesses, participate in the religious and cultural social life in the city, mix with the Hindu Maharashtrian inhabitants, or even vote in the political elections. Thackeray also banned Muslims from entering the city, believing that with “their high birthrate, they would easily outnumber the Hindu population.”20 In other words, through this master plan he preached ethnic nationalism and Hindu extremism, and believed that Mumbai should only consist of those who were indigenous to the land before “the Muslim invaders arrived hundreds of years ago.”21 He served as the central authority, acting as the primary enforcer of this plan, and from 1985 to 2001, he ruled Mumbai with a nationalistic iron fist.

The second pillar of Thackeray’s Shiv Sena party consisted of his numerous employees effectively attempting to reach out to the largest number of people and to provide them with most of the benefits within the urban environment. This mirrored the modernist idea of achieving the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. Through this principal, Shiv Sena and Thackeray were able to gain immense legitimacy and were thus able to effectively direct the administration and law enforcement sectors of Mumbai with “invincible effectiveness that subjected the city to racial and ethno-religious transformations.”22 At the surface, this policy of citywide benevolence may seem politically, socially, and civilly promising. However, there was a catch. Thackeray, Shiv Sena, and numerous followers only wanted to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of indigenous Hindus and Maharashtrans, effectively excluding the rising Muslim population from participating in the political party’s various projects. Thackeray reached a helping hand toward his own, but shunned those who needed his attention the most.23 Hindus across the urban area were thus granted special privileges: lower tax rates, easy entrance into employment and business startups, lower-priced education, multiple city-wide holidays during the year to celebrate the plethora of cultural and religious festivals in the Hindu calendar, and affordable better-quality municipal amenities (housing, water supply, sanitation). Thus, his policy of widespread benefits for the
entire population of Mumbai was exclusively allotted to Hindus, and specifically to Maharashtrans. The Muslim population was simply not a part of Shiv Sena’s plan for the urban progress, and thus their personal deprivation in all aspects of city life was essentially “not of concern to Thackeray and his hordes of supporters” during the 1985-2001 phase of Mumbai’s history.24

Admittedly, Thackeray justified his party’s extreme interpretation of modernist ideology by relating his actions as both a method of revenge and a tool for socio-economic and civil progress throughout the urban area. He justified his policies by consistent addresses to his followers in which he claimed that he was excluding the Muslim population because of the atrocities that they committed during the 1947 Partition of India. He also felt that the Hindus of Mumbai would be in harm’s way if he granted the Muslims “full access to every urban amenity.”25 In other words, he did not want Hindus to lose jobs, housing perks, or a sense of cultural and religious belonging because of the orthodox Islamic inhabitants of the city. Thus, he only wished to include his own people (ethnic Maharashtran Hindus) in his plan to provide the greatest benefits for the largest number of people. Thackeray, his Shiv Sena party, and its millions of supporters unfortunately employed policies and engaged in actions against the Muslim population that would ultimately result in widespread communal bloodshed and even terrorist attacks during the rather turbulent 1990s Mumbai.

The Result: Communal Bloodshed and a Failing Modernist City

The consequences of the modernist ideology that had gripped the city prior to the most recent turn of the century revealed its brutally undesirable face merely seven years after Thackeray and Shiv Sena had begun to institute an anti-Muslim master plan. On December 6th, 1992, Hindu extremists in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh destroyed the historically important Babri Masjid Mosque after both social and political fallouts within the region.26 As a result, Hindu-Muslim riots exploded across the nation, and with Mumbai enveloped by an inter-religiously tense environment, naturally, it saw the worst of the violence.

From mid-December, 1992 to mid-January, 1993, Mumbai was essentially completely consumed by unimaginably horrific communal
riots. Each corner of the city became a killing field, with the worst of the violence occurring in the poverty-stricken slums that dotted the northern region of the urban area. Hindus and Muslims alike slaughtered one another for one month, using almost anything they could find as weapons, and in many instances resorting to total war strategies (coercive rape, setting fire to houses, and robbery/looting of businesses). Bal Thackeray and his supporters, however, played their role carefully, as they took advantage of the incessant chaos and made it a point to “assist in exterminating as many Muslims as possible through their political, police, and socio-civil networks.” Thackeray thus was essentially unstoppable during the communal clashes that lasted through the greater part of January 1993. When the conflagration finally came to a close after thirty days of terror that included a multitude of human rights abuses (police brutality and genocide-like executions), over 900 individuals had perished, more than half of whom were Muslims.

Because of Thackeray’s role in the riots, the number of casualties was thus religiously lopsided, and he and his supporters believed that Mumbai would be able to “progress without check in the coming years.” Modernist plans therefore had culminated in an ethno-religious tragedy that in the eyes of those affected, seemed socially, politically, civilly, and even economically irreversible. The master plan had thus entailed this spontaneous final solution that was certainly radically different that any interpretation forwarded by Le Corbusier, the renowned urban planner who essentially allowed the ideology to flourish. Surveys conducted across the city of Mumbai in the months and years following the communal riots illustrated the true, underlying effects of such widespread bloodshed and hatred: “Hindus and Muslims alike were devastated, not everyone supported Thackeray […] perhaps there is no going back from this terrible deed.” Millions backed away from the Shiv Sena, claiming that they did not want be associated with bloodshed in any form. Unfortunately, Thackeray and his supporters deemed those who were disloyal to the Shiv Sena in the immediate aftermath of the riots as outsiders. They were essentially considered political, so-
cial, and cultural outcasts who were not “true” Maharashtrians. Thackeray and his followers thus became the subject of much investigation in the months following the violence, as both police officials and local/state political figures who had initially supported him and Shiv Sena began to reconsider their loyalty. This process of political and socio-civil de-legitimization was reinforced after the 1993 Mumbai Bombings that ripped through the city, killing more than 255 people.30

March, 1993 proved to be yet another violent and chaotic chapter in Mumbai’s modernist urban history, as Islamic terrorists detonated a series of thirteen bombs across the area, in order to seek revenge for the widespread attacks on Muslims that had ensued merely two months prior.31 Originating from Pakistan, the perpetrators of the attacks justified their actions by claiming they were operating for both the sake of jihad and to avenge the hundreds of Muslim deaths during the communal riots of early 1993. These tragic events allowed for a slow, but ultimately effective urban ideological revolution, as Thackeray and his Shiv Sena party began to lose much of their legitimacy due to the vicious cycle they had essentially created with their anti-Muslim policies during the last fifteen years of the 20th century. From a theoretical standpoint, planners and policymakers alike saw the long lasting effects of his actions, and thus modernism was categorized as a failing strategy for the city as whole, as it had been radically distorted in order to fulfill the racially extreme and ethno-religiously radical views of the Shiv Sena party.32

Furthermore, at the fundamental level of urban development, Kotkin’s elements were also affected, as his critical elements of sacredness, security, and commerce had all become questionable within the political, social, and civil infrastructure of Mumbai post-1993. The inherent urban identity or the ability of each resident to have a sense of belonging and call themselves “Mumbaikars” became all the more controversial. Ethnic and religious discrimination and communal hatred thus obscured the social fabric of the city, as Hindus and Muslims alike simply did not understand “if they truly were part of the greater Mumbai community.”33 Security, of course, had been compromised, and the inter-religious tensions were consistently turbulent, with small scale clashes occurring even in the five to seven years after the 1993 horrors. The internal safety of the urban area was thus at a minimum or simply nonexistent during
these years, which ultimately affected the commercial economic sector of the city. Each element of Mumbai’s growing economy was severely hurt by communal riots especially in the immediate years following, as the general levels of fear and mistrust between the two largest ethno-religious groups of the city were unimaginably high. Thus, Mumbai became a status quo of social, civil, and economic deprivation, which, if in any other city, would have meant complete urban disaster. Thackeray and his Shiv Sena party, though declining in popularity for many of the city’s inhabitants, were still “in power” and had an effective hold over the political, social, and civil realm of the city. However, as the 21st century became visible on the temporal horizon of Mumbai, the urban environment began to shift, as Thackeray and his much smaller following began to refocus their strategy away from the sole exclusion of the Muslim population. With its fewer numbers, Shiv Sena became more specific in its strategies and thus began a city-wide campaign against a small ethnic group known as the Biharis, who originated from the North Indian state of Bihar, and did not constitute a large portion of Mumbai’s population. Their ideology became even more conservative and narrow-minded, which essentially served as a cue for the local and even state government to intervene and employ a new, transformative policy for the entire city. Thus, the transition from modernism to postmodernism began to show at the turn of the century, as Thackeray began to slip into a more behind-the-scenes role, paving the way for a revived, unique Mumbai that was nonetheless more volatile than one could imagine.

**Transitional Turbulence: The Modern/Postmodern Urban Environment (2001-Present)**

The 21st century provided the Mumbai Municipal Corporation (MMC), which consisted of the mayor and other high ranking political and law enforcement officials who harbored a deep desire for urban re-development as well as a shift away from Thackeray and Shiv Sena’s extreme nationalistic policies. They combined their vision for a more progressive and integrated Mumbai with the state government’s (which was headed by the Chief Minister and his cabinet) idea for a citywide transformation and essentially tried to restructure the social, political, and civil environment of the city. Their efforts included widespread disapproval of Thackeray and Shiv Sena’s policies and actions, and mil-
lions lobbied in the national capital, New Delhi, in order to force the Indian government to outlaw the extremist and radically racist ideology that had ruled Mumbai for so many years. Protests were conducted, petitions were filed, and millions hoped to move toward a more progressive and successful Mumbai, whose environment they hoped would serve as an emblem of communal unity and sustained diversity throughout even the international community. This urban revolution, which began in 2001 and is still an ongoing process, basically consists of a postmodern adaptation that would more or less apply two of its principal elements to a highly modernist Mumbai. The idea was not to demolish the modern ideology that had empowered the urban policy and planning sector of the city, but rather to reorganize and apply a more progressive approach to the already existing foundation. This transitional phase between modernism and postmodernism within the urban area consisted of what the new emerging authority believed would be “a change for the better […] which could ensure the city’s progress especially during the peak of globalization and its pivotal side effect: modernization.”

The first postmodern strategy employed within Mumbai consisted of an abolishment of the master plan with its central authority (Bal Thackeray), and the immediate institution of a more bureaucratic system that focused on the marginalized groups’ (i.e. Muslim) needs and wants rather than simply doing the greatest good for greatest number of people. This highly progressive and openly liberal idea was met with widespread praise by not only the entire political, legislative, and economic sectors of society, but also the millions of individuals who had been consistently brainwashed by the radical modernist ideas of Thackeray and Shiv Sena. This first postmodern method consisted of a rather complex plan that essentially sought to renew the deeply deprived Muslim population for the sake of socio-economic renewal, and civil progress that would create a more balanced urban society that would prove to enrich the successes of the city as a whole in the future. However, it must be noted that the shift from a highly centralized plan that revolved around a master plan was fundamentally different than the hierarchical bureaucracy attempting to replace it. Essentially, the MMC was divided into multiple departments each with a specialized focus within the urban environment. Each would address the specific issues that were ongoing in the city, such as housing, sanitation, transportation, security, and even
ground-level commercial elements (businesses and trade). What made the system postmodern, however, was that their efforts were primarily focused on the marginalized population of Mumbai at the time, which for the purpose of this argument, were the Muslims inhabitants. The idea here was to rejuvenate their living conditions in every way possible, and the MMC essentially addressed the concerns and problems that were most easily solvable first. Thus, housing, sanitation, and transportation became their main focus, as they believed that this would eventually create a chain reaction that would improve the security and economic facets of the urban infrastructure. As previously stated, throughout the modernist period of Mumbai, and even today, millions of the city’s Muslim dwellers lived in slum-like conditions that essentially lacked all the basic amenities for life (running water, sewage, electricity). The plan was to restructure these sprawling, poor areas, and transform them into more humane and habitable environments for the sake of strengthening the weakened Muslim population. The logic here was to introduce a new standard of living for the completely marginalized population that had incessantly suffered during the Thackeray era. By assisting the Muslim population, which was and still is the largest religious minority within Mumbai, both the MMC and its supportive Maharashtran government hoped that “communal unity would be redefined for the better.” Thus, urban planning and policy was redirected to a less centralized, more bureaucratic structure which sought to better the everyday lives of the deeply marginalized Muslim population, which served as the first half of the postmodern strategy within the city.

The second pillar of the postmodern element that was (and still is) being applied to Mumbai’s urban infrastructure is the reinforcement of indigenous aesthetics into the city that “relay social, cultural, and ethno-religious traditions that are of historical importance to the city.” This facet of the more progressive and liberal approach that planners and policymakers were attempting to employ was primarily focused on the strengthening of landmarks or areas across the urban area that were (and still are) deeply revered by the population that called the city home long before the communal tensions even began to surface. Predictably, this group was the indigenous Hindu Maharashtrans, who lived in the city prior to the “Muslim migration centuries ago.” The specific buildings, temples, museums, and historical monuments that they have held sacred
for what seems like eternity were not the center of attention during the Thackeray modernist period. Because Shiv Sena and its leader essentially focused the large majority of their political campaigns around the urban area specifically targeting the Muslim population, they did not care much about the general aesthetics of the city. They believed that these specific elements did not carry as much political and social weight as a clear socio-economic superiority over the Islamic minority, and thus they focused on improving the living, learning, and consumption facets of the Hindu and Maharashtran urban society within Mumbai. Inevitably, the little improvements made to the cultural, traditional, and religious landmarks of the city were completely damaged or even destroyed during the communal riots and subsequent terrorist attacks of 1993.

Thus, the urban planning and policy sector of the city decided to reinstitute the aesthetic restoration program within Mumbai, and plans were made to rebuild and restructure numerous Hindu temples, historic museums, cultural and religious statues, and architecturally symbolic monuments and buildings. Designers and architects were consulted on a war footing, as a large movement for art and culture began to develop as a direct result of the postmodernist ideology. The rationale behind such an idea was that the postmodern system within the urban area would act as a two-pronged approach: the bureaucratic system would appease the marginalized Muslim population, while this rejuvenation of aesthetics into the city would address the wants and needs of the Hindus who longed for a strengthened sense of identity and belonging after their disillusionment with the extremist modern ideology. Thus, the MMC as well as the state government believed that such a plan would be a turning point for Mumbai, in that it would achieve a healthy ethno-religious balance between the majority and minority populations, and that it would allow for social, civil, and economic progress after a horrific decade of communal bloodshed and hatred.

However, with a population so large, and with the ethno-religious divisions historically tense within the urban fabric of the city, the transitional modern-postmodern system in Mumbai was, and still is, unable to alleviate the city’s underlying communal tensions, but instead dra-
matically worsens the volatility between the Hindus and Muslims. The influence of postmodern ideas on an already fractionalized modernist urban environment was thus ineffective in bringing about the change that so many had desired.\textsuperscript{46} The ongoing instability between both religious groups seems to be directly stemming from the MMC and state government’s adaptation of postmodern ideas onto a modern urban environment, which essentially has created transitional turbulence around Mumbai. The ongoing communal tensions are quite severe, and the modern to postmodern phase’s effects are best illustrated by the social and economic disparity between Hindus and Muslims who reside within the urban area.

**The Result: Deep Socio-Economic Divide/Rebirth of Communal Tensions (Current Issues)**

Analysts and scholars who concluded that the 1990s were unimaginably horrific for Mumbai in terms of the socio-civil, political, and economic turmoil of the urban environment have admitted that “the ongoing volatility between Hindus and Muslims is slightly worse.”\textsuperscript{47} This statement is certainly justifiable by the complex influences that the modern to postmodern transition has had on the city. Currently, the primary and most tangible effect is the visible socio-economic differences that exist between the two religious groups, which have served as a complementary element to the powerful rebirth of the communal tensions throughout the urban area. Thus, at the turn of the century, planners and policy-makers who embraced the postmodern elements that existed within their “double-edged urban rehabilitation approach,”\textsuperscript{48} failed to see how their ideas would make the situation worse, and the effects of their strategies are still evident today.

Superficially, the idea of a highly bureaucratic municipal system that would replace the extremist Thackeray ideology was perfect for Mumbai at the time, but many failed to see that the urban society within Mumbai was and still is deeply divided along inter-religious lines because of its turbulent history. Addressing the needs of the marginalized Muslim population thus serves as a rather idealistic plan that simply failed to follow through due to the underlying ethno-religious tensions that simply resurface when the MMC tries to employ its programs. Local activists,
civil workers, and even police officers who initially began to adapt the postmodern strategies became wary of the large-scale Muslim deprivation that had occurred during the Thackeray era, as well as the visible successes of the Hindu population throughout the urban area. As administrative officials from around the city and even state worked towards improving the conditions within the slums and other poverty-stricken areas of Mumbai, an overwhelming fear began to overcome them, which is what helps to fuel the lack of effort on their part even today. As the impoverished Muslim population of the city continues to suffer due to poor housing, educational opportunities, business resources, and basic amenities of everyday life, the Hindu-led MMC and state government is simply too scared to help. They believe that with their assistance, the Muslim groups that have long been deprived due to the modernist period will become strengthened socially, civilly, economically, or even worse, politically. Employees of the MMC and state government responsible for addressing the marginalized needs and wants are thus frightened at the idea of a Muslim renewal, and urban rejuvenation that would allow them to parallel the success of the larger and more dominant Hindu population. The various departments that were created during the modern-postmodern transition therefore are rather ineffective in assisting the Muslim inhabitants out of poverty and into an overall, more sustainable quality of life. Thus, as the population continues to rise on a monthly and even weekly basis, more and more Islamic city dwellers are moving into the massive slums of Mumbai, unable to afford the more expensive housing and standard of life their Hindu counterparts have access to.

Sameera Khan, a noted urban economist who surveyed a medium-sized slum that contained both Hindus and Muslims and then compared her data with the broader demographics of the city, perhaps best illustrates this fact. Her results are compiled in Table 1, which illustratively shows the deep disparity between the two opposing religious groups currently residing in the city.

This data shows the clear differences between the Hindu and Muslim populations within Mumbai, as Khan later concluded that such results were paralleled across numerous other slums she surveyed throughout the city. Thus, economically, the two religious groups are in drastically opposing positions within the urban fabric of the city, and the postmodern strategy that initially served a method to unify both groups and solve
Religion | Group 1 (most poor) | Group 2 | Group 3 | Group 4 (least poor) 
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- 
Hindu | 415 (32%) | 600 (46%) | 712 (54%) | 753 (57%) 
Muslim | 858 (65%) | 639 (49%) | 474 (36%) | 441 (34%) 
Other | 36 (3%) | 70 (5%) | 126 (10%) | 115 (9%) 

Table 1. A table showing the deep disparity between religious groups currently residing in Mumbai.

the communal issues actually exacerbated the problem by further entrenching the differences. Fear and paranoia thus overwhelms much of the Hindu population today, and the MMC and state governments mirror such concerns. Unfortunately, this creates a vicious cycle of ethno-religious division within the urban environment.

As the bureaucratic postmodern system created economic and social differences between the Hindus and Muslims of Mumbai, the second pillar of the ideology worsened the situation by adding an even more divisive urban element: the strengthening (or introduction) of indigenous aesthetics. By putting a focus on the restoration or new construction of various temples, monuments, and buildings that are significant to only the Hindus, the MMC and its supporters only added “fuel to the fire that was burning within each Muslim resident.” Because the Thackeray era had instilled a longing for recognition and identity for the Islamic inhabitants of Mumbai, the special attention given to the Hindu aesthetics within the city angered and frustrated the marginalized minority. Those that were affected by the lack of attention given to them by the ineffective bureaucracy thus were enraged, as they felt neglected and forgotten. Furthermore, many of the planners and architects who were behind the rejuvenation of indigenous elements into the urban infrastructure of Mumbai claimed to have acted out of “deep Islam-o-phobia.” They believed that the Muslim population would be ‘itching for revenge’ after the 1993 horrors, and thus, they sought to solidify the Hindu presence throughout the city. Mosques, Muslim monuments, and other sites of religious, socio-cultural, or traditional significance were completely neglected in the postmodern strategy involving
urban aesthetics. This proved to be detrimental to the communal divide, as Hindus became culturally, religiously, and socially more potent than their Islamic counterparts, who were struggling to extricate themselves from the modernist-era deprivation. Thus, this second strategy, which is still an ongoing process, offered a powerful social element that added to the economic disparities between the Hindus and Muslims within Mumbai.\textsuperscript{55} The Hindus therefore have a tangible sense of superiority over their Islamic rivals in each sector of the urban society, especially socially and economically. Tensions between both groups consequently have reached their highest peak since the 1993 Mumbai Riots, which to millions of residents across the city is of growing concern in a variety of ways.

The current situation involving the deep socio-economic divide between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai is pervasively volatile throughout the urban area, which naturally has coincided with extremely high levels of inter-religious opposition. Thus, the communal clash between both groups has been effectively reborn, rather than eliminated, which is directly attributable to the “ideological transition of the urban environment.”\textsuperscript{56} It is therefore important to remember that the causality behind this current situation is the postmodern elements that have been applied to a deeply modernist city that essentially results in a turbulent urban phase that has far-reaching effects, including the socio-economic cleavages between both groups, as well as the complementary communal tensions that “currently envelop the city.”\textsuperscript{57} The ideological shift between modern and postmodern policy and planning within Mumbai has produced consequences that have placed the city on edge and its inhabitants at the mercy of the very-visible inter-religious hatred as well as clear socio-economic dominance of the Hindu residents. Thus, it is no surprise that analysts and scholars argue “Mumbai is on the brink of another widespread riot that could exceed the horrors of 1993 ten-fold.”\textsuperscript{58} Sporadic clashes between both groups occur rather frequently and many Muslim groups have taken to streets in protest of their currently dismal state of affairs within the urban fabric. Those who convene in the city’s large plazas and markets claim they have not been demoralized by the ineffective MMC and their clear negligence of their social, civil, and economic identity throughout the years. Instead, they argue they are getting stronger with each passing day, and many have even proposed that a counter-attack is certainly on the immediate horizon.\textsuperscript{59} Local, state,
and even national political officials are thus deeply concerned about the communal tensions that are ongoing in Mumbai, as within the last few years, protests and small-scale clashes have resulted in a small number of casualties but nevertheless widespread urban disarray. The police, as well as many of the civil activists who work alongside the political and administrative figures of the urban area, are calling for action to be taken in order to avoid a violent explosion that would surpass the 1993 chaos.

The atmosphere in Mumbai is still rather volatile, as the communal issues between Hindus and Muslims continued to be exacerbated by the ongoing modern-postmodern transition. Violence occurs quite often, and the clear socio-economic divides between both groups are becoming increasingly visible. Unfortunately, internal and external elements separate from the ideological transition make the situation even worse. Perhaps the three most hampering issues that directly affect the current volatility within Mumbai are transnational terrorism, widespread corruption, and violent regional unrest. All of these severely limit individuals who wish to address and resolve the communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims and “push for a more successful urban future.” Such problems produce challenging obstacles that urban planners, policymakers, and even citizens must overcome.

**Contributing Factors: Terrorism, Regional Unrest, and Corruption**

Transnational terrorism occurs in almost every large democracy in the world, but perhaps no city has seen quite the level of violence that Mumbai has experienced within the last decade. The specific actions of Islamic jihadist terrorists have not only resulted in widespread death and destruction within the city, but they have also severely affected the communal tensions between both Hindus and Muslims residing in the urban area. The problem lies not only in the attacks themselves, but also in the far-reaching influences they have on the underlying inter-religious opposition struggling to overcome ideological changes, as well as the...
forces of globalization and technological modernization.\textsuperscript{62} Since 2001, Mumbai has seen eight significant attacks that have claimed 471 lives and injured thousands more, and as technology and communication have both improved dramatically since the turn of the century, the attacks have become more frequent and fatal. In each instance, the terrorist attack is in the form of an explosive, which is either detonated by a timer or individually by hand. Four attacks occurred in the first half of 2003 alone. The deadliest attack occurred in the summer of 2006, in which seven bombs ripped through the commuter trains in the city killing hundreds. The latest event occurred in the summer of 2011, in which three bombs exploded in all corners of the city, essentially putting Mumbai on edge for months. However, prior to that, in November of 2008, the most extensive terrorist attack to date occurred over a span of three days within South Mumbai. It was nicknamed “India’s 9/11,” which consequently lead to city’s categorization as “a safe-haven/target-city for Islamic terrorism.”\textsuperscript{63}

One thing that contributes to the communal tensions is the fact that all the attacks were carried out by the Pakistan-supported Lashkar-e-Taiba (LTE) or the Indian Mujahideen, both of which are Islamic jihadi-terrorist groups. This worsens the attitude of the Hindus, who therefore have more legitimacy in focusing on Hindu rejuvenation and strengthening within the urban environment, rather than addressing the more extremist factions within the Muslim population, who seek violence rather than reconciliation. Thus, a vicious cycle is induced, in which Islamic terrorists frustrate and upset the Hindu-dominated MMC and government, who then neglect the Muslim population, which then leads to a larger support for jihad and attacks within the city.\textsuperscript{64} The irony behind the situation, however, is that within these attacks Hindus and Muslims are equally affected, which makes them non-discriminatory in nature. Nevertheless, the communal tensions are certainly affected, which only worsens the scope for urban progress in Mumbai.

Regional unrest shares many similarities with the effects of transnational terrorism on the communal relationships within the city, and throughout the 21st century, its influences have become more visible. The logic here is that across the various states within India, Hindu-Muslim tensions periodically flare up, especially in the North and North-
east regions, which then creates communal clashes and protests within Mumbai.\textsuperscript{65} Government forces that clash with Muslims in other parts of the nation are therefore responsible for the inter-religious heat experienced throughout the urban areas hundreds of miles away. The idea of a vicious cycle or chain reaction exists, which only leads to a renewed fear of Muslims (and vice versa) within Mumbai and deepens the socio-economic cleavages between the opposing religious groups. The far-reaching effects of the regional unrest across India therefore categorize Mumbai as “a time bomb,”\textsuperscript{66} as Hindu violence against Muslims (and vice versa) in other parts of the country trigger violent protests and riots across the urban area. Here, yet another external element exists within the issue of communal tensions, which inevitably makes the challenges more complex and harder to solve.

The final obstacle that contributes to the difficulty local, state, and national authorities have in addressing the communal tension within Mumbai is the prevalence of corruption. This problem exists in all sectors of the urban society including the civil (police, city employees), political (local and state-elected officials), and economic (small and large businesses alike). Everyone from “the mayor of the city to the public maintenance worker has a hand in the pot of money and greed.”\textsuperscript{67} Bribery is omnipresent, and many crimes regardless of the severity are settled over money, which leads to a chain reaction resulting in increased greed and heightened corruption. Therefore, corruption does not allow for an efficient or productive way to address the needs and wants of the marginalized Muslim population in the city, or for an organized manner in which to institutionalize the indigenous aesthetics within the city. Corruption in Mumbai essentially revolves around one cardinal rule: If I am to make money, my fellow citizen must eventually lose money.\textsuperscript{68} It is a zero-sum game within the urban environment, as no two individuals can simultaneously prosper through corruption. The communal tension therefore worsens because planners and policymakers do not have considerable monetary or material incentive to work, because they believe their efforts will ultimately succumb to forces of corruption when all deals are finalized. Because Hindus are predominantly the individuals making the decisions, this eventually trickles down to the Muslim population, which inevitably suffers the brunt of the corrupt atmosphere within the city.\textsuperscript{69} Thus, much like the terrorism element, a vicious cycle
ensues, which ultimately results in social, civil, and political negligence against the minority Islamic group. Consequentially, anger and frustration follow, which exacerbates the already tense environment.

These detrimental external and internal forces that have currently worsened the ongoing communal tensions within Mumbai serve as the principal side effect of an ideologically transitive urban atmosphere undergoing globalization and technological modernization simultaneously. Predictably, Kotkin’s thesis also becomes part of the greater analysis in light of the multitude of challenges the city is facing. Sacredness, or a sense of identity and belonging, continues to be a very controversial topic for Mumbaikars as a whole, as the deep socio-economic cleavages cause the dominant Hindu population to “question whether or not the Muslim inhabitants really have the right to call Mumbai home.” This is directly related to both the security and commerce elements that Kotkin outlines, as each of the three ideas essentially affect the other. Security, of course, is jeopardized, as terrorism, communal clashes, and violent protests continue to be a problem. The economic sector of the city is thus deeply affected, as business, small and large, simply “do not wish to have their profits destroyed by the inter-religious problems.” Both elements ultimately tie back to the question of social, civil, and political identity, or sacredness, which illustrates how each are intrinsically connected with one another.

Thus, the final pressing questions that remains are: What should be done about Mumbai? How shall urban planners and policymakers utilize the city’s strengths (of which there are many) and join hands with local and state authorities in order to ensure the success of the city in the immediate and far future? The answers to these questions might just be part of the solution to this urban area’s “communal crisis.”

A Plan for Success: Mumbai’s Future

As grim as the current situation within Mumbai may seem, the city certainly has a plethora of social, economic, and civil strengths that should certainly be at the forefront of discussions regarding the city’s communal, as well as general, progress in the coming years. The city serves as the financial capital of the nation, as well as one of the largest tourist hubs in South Asia. Businesses are flourishing, education op-
opportunities are outstanding, and job markets and housing markets are reaching their peaks. In order to preserve such high points, however, the city must address its core problem of communal conflict, which only seems to be worsening as the postmodern ideology begins to completely mask its modernist predecessor. Perhaps utilizing its more positive elements is the place to begin on the road to peace, and ultimately, social and civil progress. Urban analysts as well as a variety of scholars from other fields propose rather insightful ideas that certainly could help overcome the city’s communal issues. Each presents a unique viewpoint that seems to “address many of the ailments” induced by the ongoing modern-postmodern shift.74

A starting point for change could be achieved if the urban planners, policymakers, and politicians within Mumbai realize that their actions are not strengthening the city, but are in fact weakening it. Many local and state authorities are in denial about the tense communal environment, and thus do not find that action is necessary at all, which is a “serious urban detriment […] especially considering the high volatility that currently envelops the city.”75 To amend this, those who are in charge of making the important decisions within Mumbai must assure that Muslims are incorporated into the economic and social sector of the city, as they are very beneficial to the informal economy as well as the international appeal of area. Diversity and multiculturalism have always been a principal take-away message from any study of Mumbai, so efforts must be made to ensure the livelihood of this element. Furthermore, “not every Muslim hates every Hindu and vice-versa […] and not every Muslim supports Islamic extremism/terrorism.”76 The local and state officials, primarily those who are Hindu, should utilize this feature in order to promote communal unity and achieve some sort of common ground between the two religious groups. Finally, there must also be some sort of attitudinal change within the urban infrastructure of Mumbai. Planners and policymakers should work with the postmodern ideas being adapted into the modern urban environment rather than to delegitimize them for the sake of “ethno-religious and/or socio-economic superiority.”77 Thus, the
population must essentially change its mindset as a whole, which could then lead to a more progressive and liberal plan of action within the urban environment. However, as is the case with any large, growing megalopolis, numerous obstacles exist, which could impede any of the solutions previously listed. Mumbai is experiencing not only high levels of corruption and terrorism, but also an exorbitant population crisis that only worsens the effects of the two former elements. By 2020, experts believe that Mumbai’s population could reach “upwards of 28-30 million people,” which naturally serves as an urban detriment in light of the ongoing communal and ideological issues within the city.

We can only hope that the social, civil, and economic agents of this powerfully unique world-city find the ideal balancing act which may lead to success during the many years to come. Evidently, much work is yet to be done, as a plethora of problems exists in each realm of the urban society within Mumbai. However, by working alongside one another and utilizing the modern-postmodern transition to the best of their ability, the residents of this urban hub can surely begin to overcome the deeply rooted communal tensions as well as its many side-effects that continue to plague the area. Put best by an anonymous blogger, “Mumbai is unfortunately both the city of dreams and nightmares, and its future is in God’s hands.” Ironically, it seems that God, here, is the source of many of the problems rather than the solution. Perhaps only time can tell.
REFERENCES

OLD TENSIONS, NEW MEANING, MORE HEALING (YAW)

FOOTNOTES:

3 Season of Cambodia, post-festival summary final report.
5 During the rule of the Khmer Rouge, roughly two million Cambodians were killed. Since then, Cambodia, with the supervision of the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC) and NGO efforts, transitioned out of civil strife to build an elected government. Ibid.
6 Hughes, 2011. Pg. 1504.
7 Arn Chorn-Pond, founder of Cambodian Living Arts, is a defender of Cambodian-American human rights. He was also sent to a children’s labor camp and later educated at Brown University. On a trip back to Cambodia, he “discovered” surviving master artists and decided to start the Cambodian Masters Performers Program, now renamed Cambodian Living Arts.
8 Hughes, 2011. Pg. 1502.
9 The shift in the mission from preservation to promotion came out of the NGO’s realization of need for funding. John Burt, personal communication via email, December 10, 2013.
10 Events included a collaborative piece with choreographer Sophiline Cheam Shapiro and a solo exhibition at Pich’s representative Tyler Rollins Gallery.
11 Including the world heritage site Angkor Wat, these architectural and religious objects have dominated art historical studies of Cambodian art. Little is written beyond this Angkor Kingdom period other than as a decline from that point of artistic renaissance. See Kossak, 1994.
12 The achievements of Angkor and the disaster of the DK are represented as intimately linked, even by international policy analysts like Brown and Toimberman, 1998. See Hughes and Pupavac, 2005, pg. 876.
13 CLA’s original mission was to discover and equip artists in Cambodia.
15 A good contrast to another Southeast Asian national festival would be Indonesia festival. Also organized by non-government organization/cultural foundation to promote the culture of Indonesia, the festival included the same sponsor, Ford Foundation. “Sculpture of Indonesia” had, however, a narrow focus on classical Indonesian sculpture and elite court arts. Wallis’ criticism of the festival’s approach is that it ignored diversity. See Wallis, 1991, pg. 89.
16 Schneider, 2013.
18 Art therapists require a graduate degree, and its professional use in disaster-struck countries and patients is increasing recognized as helpful, though not easily measurable. Here, it would be more accurate to understand trauma and art as “art as therapy” rather than as “art in therapy.” See American Art Therapy Association, 2013.
20 Season of Cambodia post-festival summary final report.
22 The concept coined by political scientist Benedict Anderson informs the definition of a nation as “a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.” Anderson, 1983, pg. 6.
23 The models of this would be the sponsors of Cambodian Rattan, Cynthia Hazen Polsky and
Leon B. Polsky, whose collection includes Southeast Asian works. They are “cultural partners” of Season of Cambodia. John Burt, personal communication via email, December 10, 2013.

24 Recently, the Cambodian tribunal sparked American anxieties and revealed remnants of the influence of the DK in politics. The Cambodian representatives are restricting its remit to crimes committed within the Cambodian borders only while DK was in power and shielding Khmer leaders of less than first-tier party leaders. See Un, 2011, pg. 204-205.


26 Whether these truth-tellings provide psychological and emotional benefits to victims is debated, as they might cause more harm than good for post-conflict civilians. See Mendeloff, 2009, pg. 592-593.


28 In an interview with Erin Gleeson, she quoted, “It is important for me that people connect to my work. It is good if sculptures make people aware that there are shapes in their environment. It encourages them to use their memory. I prefer that my work does this than rather that do something that is political or definitive.” See Gleeson, 2009.


31 Mashberg and Blumenthal, 2013.

32 Vogel, 2012.

33 Wagstaff was quoted, “Having a dialogue with the past and the present, the most vital conversation we can have today.” Cambodian Rattan fits perfectly with the curator’s vision. See Vogel, 2012.

34 Guy, 2013. Pg. 90.


36 This comparison is tinged with irony. “An estimated 90% of the living artists and intellectuals were targeted by Pol Pot while none of the ancient ruins of Angkor or the collections in the National Museums were touched or harmed.” John Burt, personal communication via email, December 10, 2013.

37 MOMA’s “Primitivism” in the 20th century: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern was an exhibition that sparked debate because of curator William Rubin’s way of displaying tribal works of influence alongside modern art pieces. It was criticized for falling into a Modernist trap of providing only a pure aestheticization of the work of native cultures. Magiciens, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, served to counter this ideology by allowing country representatives to select artists who they thought were the greatest artistic talents of their nation. Both exhibitions continue to be the subject of critique. See Enwezor, 2003, pg. 59, and Torgovnick, 1989, pg. 308-312.

38 Pich’s childhood memory of seeing destroyed Buddha sculptures in temples is often quoted and noted as a traumatized criticism of cultural destruction. See Guy, 2013, pg. 92.

39 Taylor points out that colonial explorers concluded that Southeast Asia lacked original culture or that whatever culture they did possess was not theirs but either Indian or Chinese. See Taylor, 2011, pg. 8.

40 This is particularly significant in Southeast Asia, as Taylor points out that curatorial initiatives seem to lead the sparse scholarship on Southeast Asian contemporary art. See Taylor, 2011, pg. 16.

41 Guy, 2013. Pg. 90.

42 Minimalism here refers more to the abstracting of geometric forms. Suitable comparisons would be Carl Andre (b.1935) and Martin Puryear (b.1941). See Guy, 2013, pg. 93; Shiner, 2012, pg. 239; and Galligan, 2013, pg. 146.

43 Examples of artists with reasonable international acclaim are: Leang Seckon, Vandy Rattana, and Anida Yoeu Ali.


46 Glenn Adamson defines craft broadly as a general process of making and rejects the idea that

47 Photos of Pich’s creation process on the museum’s website are particularly interesting. The amateur photographs under the museum’s media features are starkly agricultural and indicative of simple, basic, and physical techniques of “harvesting,” drying, splitting, and boiling by Pich’s studio assistants. Photos with Pich making different works as well as the installation of Buddha sculpture in the Cambodian rural landscape. See Met Media (http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/collections/asian/sopheap-pich).

48 Asian “decorative” arts were admired in the Arts and Crafts movement. “Feminist” artists in the late ’70s used fiber and the “soft” hand of the artist as a sign of defiance. Land Artists of the ’80s and ’90s, such as Wolfgang Laib and Andy Goldsworthy, collected natural materials and assembled them to connect to the temporality of nature. See Auther, 2004, pg. 343-347, and Auther, 2010.

49 Schneider, 2013.

50 “What it gave me was freedom,” Pich said in an interview at the Met show. “I didn't have to worry about color. I didn't have to worry about art history. I didn't have to worry about sculpture, even, because it's just a whole new territory.” See Sunday at the Met: Cambodian Rattan Discussion (http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/collections/asian/cambodian-rattan-discussion).


52 Hughes, 2011. Pg. 1493.


54 These tensions include the tendency for NGOs to maintain closer links with Western backers than with local beneficiaries and the Cambodian People Party’s campaign that challenges the “Khmerness” of returnees to claim legitimacy in “getting things done” without foreign backing. See Hughes, 2011, pg. 1511-1512.

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