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an-a-me-sa: Greek, adv. between, among, within
Anamesa is a conversation. From its inception in 2003, the journal has sought to provide an occasion for graduate students in disparate fields to converge upon and debate issues emblematic of the human condition. In doing so, Anamesa provokes scholarly, literary, and artistic innovation through interdisciplinary dialogue, serving New York University’s John W. Draper Program and the graduate community at large.
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- **Cover Image**: Burrow by Digital Ali. R. Underwood
Contributors

James Bradley is an artist and writer living and working in San Francisco, California. His chapbook *The Cloud of Unknowing* was published by Hexagon Press in 2016.

Kirsten Shu-ying Chen lives in NYC and is currently pursuing her MFA in poetry at the New School. She is the founder of the artist collective BTP and works with Powerline, a tech platform for civic engagement. Home & happiness is a Jersey summer.

Stephanie Couey is from Riverside, California and Boise, Idaho. She writes poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and critical essays, and has work appearing in *Spring Gun*, *The Tavern Lantern*, *Literary Orphans*, *Jenny Mag*, *Manifest-Station*, and elsewhere. Stephanie's work explores sexuality, hunger, transgression, embodied experience, and language. She now lives, studies, teaches, and writes in Boulder, Colorado.

Holly Day was born in Hereford, Texas, “The Town Without a Toothache.” She and her family currently live in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she teaches writing classes at the Loft Literary Center. Her published books include the nonfiction books *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, and *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, and the poetry books *Late-Night Reading for Hardworking Construction Men* (The Moon Publishing) and *The Smell of Snow* (ELJ Publications). Her needlepoints and beadwork have recently appeared on the covers of *The Grey Sparrow Journal*, *QWERTY Magazine*, and *Kiki Magazine*.

James Deitz is a veteran who served in the Air Force for five years with two deployments for Operation Iraqi Freedom and taught English in Korea for three years. He has enjoyed reading and writing poetry since he was in high school. However, after that first war experience, writing has become a sort of therapy and a necessary way of expressing his emotions—redirecting trauma into art.
Bin Feng was born in 1989 in Shanghai, China. He received his BFA from Shanghai Institute of Visual Art in 2012. At the same year, he started the MFA program of Photography in Savannah College of Art and Design, where he currently resides. Being a photographer, he also makes video installations, sculptures, and large-scale oil paintings. As the result of the language barrier, he becomes an outsider in United States. However, he takes the benefit of it and he is dedicated to act in the gap between the cultural differences.

Emily Jarvis is a Turtle-Island (Canadian)-born, South Africa-raised settler. She is in her final semester of her MS in Organizational Change Management at The New School. Isabella Brandalise is a designer exploring the poetics and politics of the everyday. She is about to receive her MFA in Transdisciplinary Design at the Parsons School of Design. Luiz Lula is a Brazilian graphic designer, also studying art direction and production design in film. Their work appearing in this issue belong to Fotosobre (Photo about/Photo over), an initiative about contact and correspondence conceived by Isabella and Luiz. They invite different people to collaborate by swapping analog films and celebrating the accidental encounters of the double-exposure images generated. Inspired by the pictures, Emily wrote caption-stories for memories of encounters that never happened.

Ian T. Kennedy is a Draper Masters Student. He likes coffee, wine, salt and vinegar potato chips, sitting, reading, and riding the subway. He teaches science, social studies, and math at an independent school in Brooklyn.

Luke Marinac is in the MFA Program at Bowling Green State University where he is a transplant from Appalachian Tennessee. His poems have appeared in Stirring, Gingerbread House and Pittsburgh Poetry Review, among others. He is also the recipient of the University of Tennessee's Margaret-Artley-Woodruff prize in poetry.

Camille Louise Maupas-Oudinot was born in 1988 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She spent most of her childhood traveling between Argentina and France, as well as expanding her voyages all over Europe and Asia. She had a passion for drawing and painting since a young age, and admired her father, who was an artist himself and helped her develop her skills. In high school, Camille majored in art and photography, and around graduation her work was shown in a collective exhibition in Buenos Aires. In 2014, Camille was admitted to the atelier of renowned Chilean artist, Juan Astica, where she studied large format painting. She has had her first solo exhibition in a small gallery in Palermo, and some of her paintings are now being considered for auction at the Fernandez Blanco Museum in Buenos Aires. Camille is exploring new paths and revisiting old ones, like black and white analog photography, digital color photography, and drawing from live models.
Johnathan McCauley is an aspiring professor and author from Buffalo, New York. He attended Wake Forest University for his BA and is currently pursuing a Masters in Humanities at New York University.

Milana Meytes is a first year Draper Master's student at NYU's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She is studying Diaspora and Memory studies, focusing on the formulation of Russian Diasporic writers' identities through their texts. Milana was born in the USSR, grew up in Washington Heights, went to undergrad in Mass. and thinks there is nothing better than a Bacon, Egg and Cheese from a NYC deli—except, maybe bagels. Fun Fact: She did indeed put on a red dress in Jerusalem as a social experiment.

Elizabeth D. Miller is a writer, researcher and independent curator based in San Diego, California. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History, Theory and Criticism at UC San Diego, where she also teaches for Muir College. Her dissertation focuses on the various lenses through which Maya ruins have appeared in U.S. fine arts and architecture between 1840 and 1970.

T. Parker is currently finishing her MA in Gender Politics and Literary Cultures at New York University's Draper Interdisciplinary Master's Program. She studies the feminism of modern poet Marianne Moore, situating it as an exploration of gendered identity construction and how gender is activated by language. She resides in Manhattan and thinks that cats are way better than most people.

Eleanor Paynter is a doctoral student in Comparative Studies at the Ohio State University, where she studies connections between text, identity, and collective memory. Currently, she is focused on migrant literature, especially refugee narratives, and their relationship to colonial histories and current migration trends. As as a poet and educator, she is interested in links between these areas of study and creative and pedagogical practice. She also serves as an editor for the Amsterdam-based literary arts journal Versal.

Gabi Schaffzin is pursuing his PhD in Art History with an Art Practice concentration at the University of California San Diego. His art and research consider the visual representation of pain and illness in a technologically mediated world dominated by a privileging of data over all else. He is a recovering capitalist who spent years working in the commercial world. These experiences inform his practice, which draws on the imagery and rhetoric of advertising and product design. You can see the emerging dialog between his research and artistic practice at utopia-dystopia.com.

T. A. Stanley lives in Brooklyn and is a recent graduate from the NYU Draper program. Her work has appeared in The Atlas Review, Belleville Park Pages, Crack the Spine Literary Magazine, among others. Follow her on Twitter @ladytstanz, it’s more fun than you think and she’s pretty nice.
B. B. Tabor is a graduate student at New York University earning her MA in the Department of Performance Studies. She is currently writing on the politics of decomposition as it relates to reenactment and reperformance. A classically trained ballet dancer with a Bachelor’s degree in Art History and Philosophy, her eclectic research interests include critical dance studies, the choreography of public mourning and visibility politics, experimental curatorial practice in performance art, and the recent death acceptance movement in North America.

Alison R. Underwood is a Kentucky native, and a first year graduate student in Parsons History of Design and Curatorial Studies Program. She is a trained artist and currently serving on the visual team for Objective (Journal of the History of Design and Curatorial Studies). Although she does not subscribe to any fixed medium, themes of identity and questions of control or influence frequently surface. Acknowledging that all experience is subjective, she attempts to create a safe-space via visual platform, a receptive ‘other’ on which to project the self. It is her belief that through this engagement the viewer is able to refine and reevaluate the self from a position of power, thus mitigating any real or perceived danger. Alison recently relocated to NYC where she continues to explore such themes through digital work and prose.

Sichong Xie’s practice deals with issues of identity, politics, cross-culturalism, and the surreal characteristics of her body in the ever-changing environment. Xie’s current body of work explores Chinese culture versus American culture, her female gender versus the patriarchy that is reflected in municipal sculptures in China, and Chinese Communist politics versus the “only one child” generations. Xie’s performances isolate her persona as a female in China within extreme natural landscapes such as the Lu Gu lake and the Qin Shi Huang mausoleum. Xie’s practice, which is founded in the brief interconnectedness of all things, explores universal questions at the intersection of the cosmos, life, death, reality, spirituality and technology.

Victor Xavier Zarour Zarzar is a doctoral student at the City University of New York’s Graduate Center. Born and raised in Mexico in a Palestinian family, he went on to complete his BA in English Literature in Rome, Italy, a city that has been fundamental in his personal and intellectual development. He is currently finishing coursework for his PhD and will start teaching literature at Baruch College in the fall. His interest in literature spans across genres and periods. His work focuses on the development of the novel, and, in particular, the works of Elena Ferrante.
Editor’s Note

Last semester, Anamesa explored Points of Departure and this semester we come full circle with Convergence. At once an essential part of intellectual and artistic discovery and a subject worthy of study in its own right, convergence is about crossing the spaces between subjects, fields of study, arguments, and ideas to find meaning in how and where things come together.

Convergence is of particular importance to the general mission of Anamesa. As an interdisciplinary journal, it is our ethos to bridge disparate fields of art and scholarship in our search for knowledge. Different subjects, disciplines, intellectual approaches, and artistic endeavors converge in this issue as we explore convergence itself.

—Chris Alarie
Editor in Chief
A Red Dress in Jerusalem

Milana Meytes

In Jerusalem at dawn, I put on a red dress.

It hugged my ribs where Eve was dislodged, falling past the ellipsis of my thighs.

The indentation left a space for the palm of a man, right in the glove between the hips and breast.

I wore a red dress in Jerusalem at dawn.

Right on the hour, the Western Wall’s pilgrims made an exodus towards the Lions gate,

and the call to prayer’s last echo reverberated in the stone.

The Messiah in red licked her lips, Come out to play!

A thousand parables thrusted at her heels, dribbling tongues, their irises vultures.

I wanted to see mortality.
Untruth

T. Parker

We let the water rise like a
slow gas leak.
Soon we will drown/
suffocate/
face the problem:

Turn your dark face
in blinding shadow,
badly broken.
Unmask the untruths
Spit:
(like words in bathroom stalls)
with strange simplifications
and dark ink.

Lies can be forgiven,
when you call them something different.
The drive into Tucson feels long, even though your husband is going seventy.

You’re trying not to think. You notice some cacti have no arms, while others have ten. You listen to songs you’ve heard hundreds of times before. A series of thuds courses through the van. The vehicle jostles and thumps as you drive over what you’ve hit.

You both get out. The coyote is torn into pieces. Dark red, pink, purple, and white wetness.

You resist the urge to vomit.

Your husband asks if you’re okay.

As a vet, you see animals die every day. But this is a different death. You don’t get to steady it with the warmth of your palm on its still-breathing abdomen.

The bar lights sputter green and pink, and emit a low fluorescent buzz. A yellow station wagon is parked in a space labeled God, and bonded to the hood is a tiny animal skull, probably from a house cat.

You take a few pictures. Your husband holds your hand.

You’re biding your time, trying not to go back to the motel across the street where the window A/C hums and gives off a sharp, salty smell like canned meat.
You’re broke because of the house you bought. It’s the kind of home you never thought you could have. Your stomach churns as you think of the house—painted violet, with the bay windows you’d always wanted, surrounded by mature firs and pines.

When your husband touched you in the motel room, your throat closed. You gripped his hand white, and put on a gooey voice. Suggested you go across the street to that bar. Loosen yourselves up.

You didn’t ask him to change out of his vacationer sandals. You didn’t look at the way his second-toe curled over the big one like a blind, fat worm.

You study the cat skull on the hood of God’s station wagon. You think, at least this guy used the skull for something.

Back in Humboldt, you built a house out of dog biscuits on the surface of your desk, like Lincoln Logs.

You feel yourself throw away more leashes in a week than rubber gloves.

You’ve been married seven months, and you’re unhappy. You try to make yourself fall again. You blur your vision when your husband walks ahead of you, trying to forget who he is.

You will yourself to only see broad shoulders and good posture, but he’s too clear. His thinning hair, the sound of his voice, almost always an octave deeper than what you know to be natural for him. It’s never regular speech, always only announcements.

You want to start over, but from where, you’re not sure.

You read an essay during the drive about how being married distracts you from being dissatisfied with yourself. Marriage is the buffer between you and total existential dissatisfaction.

You don’t buy it. You buy it. You don’t buy it.

You think back to what happened to you in college. Two boys and one girl, eighteen to your twenty. The violations. The body you had barely begun to understand. You know it changed you. What bothers you is you don’t know how.

You remember telling your boyfriend at the time, a philosophy major, two weeks after it happened.

He turned white and sucked in his lips. “Do you think there was anything you could have done differently?”

You left school for a year. You met your husband working at a Dairy Queen near Trinidad Pier. You started spending time together once autumn
fell and the tourists left. You’d share sprinkle dipped cones, licking rainbows into the cream, and you’d go home to your apartment, your mouths sticky, your chests light. You were always laughing.

After four years, you got married in the redwoods, among two thousand year old trees and spongy mosses. The air was cool and you were barefoot.

It was your shared secret that he had once fucked you against the tree nearest the altar. Had grated your back raw, bitten your ear, licked your jaw and hissed, I just want to be with you.

You never felt closer to anyone than the moment when the tiniest threads of blood trickled down your back.

You cried before the ceremonial kiss and wiped your lashes with the back of your arm, leaving stripes of black on a satin sleeve.

The Trough pulls you in. It’s still quiet.

The room is larger than the grungy outside lets on, with tall ceilings and dull flickering Christmas lights. You see corseted women holding down bar-stools with their haunches, some with breasts poured out fully over stilted satin, and men in collars and wet-looking black shorts, thongs, and leotards.

There are a few masks, mostly latex, some animalistic with snouts or ears.

You want to laugh but you don’t.

You’d always thought any kind of fetish was ridiculous. Who needs that much stuff? you’d think. The beauty of sex was that it was one of the only things you could think of doing which didn’t require any things.

Your husband bought a pair of handcuffs when you were still new to each other, but that was just him trying to put off the inevitable plateau, one you’d both agreed to before you’d even met.

Tonight your wanting to laugh shifts to an impulse to stay, to blend in, even though you know you can’t.

The alternative to leaving—going back to the motel room—makes your gut clench. Best-case scenario you’d be blocking out the TV with your headphones, listening to music you haven’t grown tired of in ten years, in bed with your husband that you’d grown tired of in a matter of months.

Both of you would feel alone together.

You’d forgotten your husband is still there, holding your hand, until he says, “Looks like we caught ‘em on a bad night.”

You tense at his voice, at how little sense he makes.

“I want to stay,” you say, not peeling your eyes away from a man about ten yards away, a chain leash attached to his crotch, being led by another to an out-of-sight room.

“And do what?” His voice bends in forced exasperation.

“Have a drink. Or two. Just stay.”
You face him. His brows are furrowed, and he’s biting his lip, not sure how best to make his point, or what his point even is. This is so unlike you. You mimic him in your head, and imagine a response: but it was once, and you used to love it.

Then your insides twist and contract as you realize you had loved this person so much.

Loved him more than air or food or sunlight or the sound of crashing waves. When his hair was shoulder length. When he was still studying to become a counselor. When he tried to read poetry with you. When he’d fuck you like you were all at once dangerous and precious and fleeting.

Now he fucks you because you’re there.
And you’re no better.

You fight a little outside.
You don’t touch.
He doesn’t grab your wrists or grip the back of your neck or tell you not to be dramatic.
He says, “These people are gross,” and, “You don’t want to be here.”
The more he says, the more you disagree with everything. Not just him—everything.
Eventually he leaves, says he hopes the room has TMZ.
He kisses your forehead just a little too hard for a second too long, like he’s trying to remind you of something.
You watch him walk away. He looks both ways before crossing the narrow one way road and the desert wind hits his hair. His arms sway loosely at his sides. You’re less sure now of being here.
But after the motel door closes and he disappears, you’re sure again.

You go back inside expecting attention, but there isn’t any.
You know you’re out of place in jean shorts and canvas sneakers that stick to the concrete floor.
The music has gotten heavier, darker since your husband left. The faces of the bar’s patrons each pop out at you with crayon-red mouths, black-lined eyes, synthetic lashes.
You sit down next to a couple. The woman is in a red corset, sitting erect with a thin long neck. She’s a little older than you. The man next to her is pale and bald, with silver-blue lips and a black trench coat reaching his feet. His head is disproportionately small to his already-small body.
She tells you she is a massage therapist, and he tells you he writes and reviews standardized tests.
They don't comment that you look out of place. They don't scan you up and down.

You share a drink with them, tell them about your husband across the street. You don't give it all away, your unhappiness, but you know they sense it, or some part of it. You feel oddly close to them already. They change the subject.

Ask if you've ever been suspended.

“Like from school?”

“Like from the air.”

You picture aerial yoga.

“God's opening up the suspension performance to the audience this evening,” he tells you. His small blue mouth sucks on a maraschino cherry. He slurps. Surprised by the sound, like a soapy-wet balloon, he apologizes.

You ask what suspension is. They tell you, and the skin on your back crawls. Your ears get hot.

You agree to go.

You drink a little more, talk a little more, and more of their friends join. They're all nice, you think, maybe too nice. You wonder how and why they're so animate and warm when the way they present themselves seems deliberately meant to cause revulsion.

They're all happy, all older than you.

One of the friends is wearing a metal cage around his exposed rosy penis. You try not to look.

You're trying to adjust, but to what, you don't know.

You get up to go to the bathroom. The women's room is labeled, “Meat.” The men's room is labeled, “Meat-Eater.” You find this gross. You wonder if the friends you've just made also find this gross, or if it's all just supposed to be fun.

You have a hard time seeing it as fun.

You walk into the two-stalled restroom, and a woman washing her hands, wearing a wire headpiece, gives you a motherly smile through the metal. She has cigarette burns all up and down her arms. She mouths a silent hey.

You're drunk. You mouth hey back.

You're hit by sadness when she leaves. It coils around your throat, pushes behind your eyes. You have to pee. You sit directly on the seat.

You rotate the amethyst wedding ring which has always loosely fit your finger. You feel the thinness of your skin. The self-containment you've never claimed.

There is blood smeared into heart shapes and X's and O's on the door in front of you with tiny smooth lines made by the texture of fingertips.
And there are carved initials, just like anywhere else.

After, you walk past your group, trying to keep your eyes focused. Lucid. Like you know what you’re doing. You notice a heavy black door ajar, where earlier you’d seen the man lead the other by the leash. Taped to the door, a sheet of notebook paper says, “Rehearsal.”

You peek inside.

Your eyes settle on a mask-less woman, with frizzy brown hair, nude save for a tight, intricate web of neon ropes. Her pillowy white skin juts out from between them. She is horizontal in the air, floating, the skins of her kneecaps, pelvic bones, shoulders and breasts stretched by large black hooks and her own weight. It is impossible to tell whether the ground or the ceiling is pulling harder for her body.

You’ve only had protected sex, and it hurts to know that you won’t try for a baby. At least not now, and not with the person you thought you would. Not in that pretty house which is yours, but might not be for long.

You think back to college and post-college together. You think of having bonfires with friends on cool and pine-scented evenings, of fingering the thick seams of each other’s jeans beneath tabletops.

You remember going vegan together for a year, watching PETA videos, wincing and crying, and then ditching it on a road trip to the East Coast when you decided to challenge one another to come up with the best gas station food combinations. You usually lost to your husband, but you remember winning once.

It was a warm and purple dusk in Kansas when you assembled a bed of Doritos drizzled with hot pumps of liquid cheese and habanero peanuts, crushed after you’d stomped on the bag in the parking lot, sprinkled over the top. Your work was crunchy and runny, almost unbearably salty, and it was hot and fake in a way which somehow felt like comfort to you both.

You loved seeing your now-husband’s look of defeat through watery eyes, sweating from the spiciness.

Your new friends take you by the hand. The woman you first spoke to laces her fingers through yours.

“It’s normal to be a little taken aback,” she says. “We’re all here because we want to be. And because we trust each other.” She nods, eyebrows raised, her smile honest and red.
You trust her.
You imagine you can tell her anything, and she'd understand.
You think it must have been something other than pain you'd seen in that room, in the blood in the bathroom, in the arms of the woman at the sink.
It must have been something else.

You see God the moment you walk in. The small room where the performances are held is set up like a miniature theater, with boxes along the walls, too small to hold actual people. You think of classic theaters as tending to be of golds and jewel-toned velvets and warm candelabra light, but this theater is all black matte paint, and thin white light.

God notices you the way you'd expected the patrons of the bar to notice you. You know it is God because a man standing close to the door hisses to his friend, starstruck, “There's God!”

“Tourists,” your friend mutters to you, and you wonder why no one is outing you as a tourist.

God gives you the down-up-down you'd anticipated from everyone else. She is the only person wearing clothes that could be described as comfortable or normal, plain black pants and a black button up shirt. But her head is shaved clean. She wears no makeup and has no eyebrows. She is pierced with at least a dozen heavy metal hoops and knobs resting in each ear. Her face is made more striking by its scars. Her lips, cheekbones, and brow are all etched with vertical white slashes, stretching her features, making her look both severe and vulnerable.

She gestures for you to sit down near the front row, and like the group who now insulates you, in spite of her appearance, you feel she gives off a distinct warmth.

The lights dim, and God takes the stage.

Her voice is light and articulate, yet nonmusical. She introduces tonight’s “darlings” and says a bit about community, and how fortunate you all are to have found one another.

She is looking right at you as she speaks, and you feel like you're being challenged.

She thanks you for being you.

Her skin rips slowly at first. Your friend holds your hand, tells you this is normal.

But then God screams so shrilly your vision blazes, and suddenly, it's over.
The lights turn back on.
You throw up in your hands.
The next morning when your head is no longer spinning, your husband's stomach growls against your arm and you decide to go get breakfast. The day is already hot and your mouth tingles at the thought of glasses of ice water, perpetually refilled.

You threw away your clothes from the night before in a trash can near the front office of the motel. You showered, and cried, and lulled yourself into a brief sleep. Your husband has gotten a full eight hours and watched Naked Gun on TMZ.

He gets up, and you want to touch him, but he's beyond expecting affection in the morning. He is out of bed and dressed, looking up breakfast restaurants on your route into Tucson.

You usually don't allow yourself heavier foods anymore, but you order hash browns and a side of grapefruit. The first bite of potatoes soothes your core—crunchy, lubed with grease, and almost too hot on your tongue. You mash some grapefruit into the hash browns once you get bored, expecting it to be vile, but it's not. It's different. It's the same. It's all the same.

Your husband touches your knee, and you let him.

You touch his.

You arrive at his parents' house, a large, white, one story art deco home surrounded by cacti blossoming fuchsia and orange buds. You help his mother make mini asparagus quiches for actual brunch. You watch stand-up comedy with his twenty year old second cousins. You sleep in the spare room by yourself with their fourteen year old Mastiff.

Eventually your body comes back to you. You begin to feel the creases in the damp duvet beneath your back.

You stir at the hollow burn of hunger.

You go to the kitchen and find saltines, almond butter, and boysenberry jam and eat until you feel nothing but warmth. The starch and sugar gel in your molars.

You go to your husband's bed and climb on top of him. In partial sleep he shoos you away.

You persist.

He gives in.

When you come, he asks, "Did you get it?" as though it were a spider you'd both wanted crushed.

With still-quaking insides you say you did. You say it just like that: "I got it."

You got some part of it.
Teasing the line, high—
tide swells deep to waist the place
where you ebb. I flux

I float I feel in the sand
coral scratch cotton
grip it with my toes
claw back
arch into waves
bend off the crest
small of my back
find you watching
I’m watching
you wander closer wade in
Now

take off your skin.
    Come swim.
Ruins are entities that occur long before they appear; that is, they are the property of the human gaze. The “ruin gaze” remakes architecture-as-image—an image continuously and collectively renegotiated—a trajectory rather than a fixed point in time. Here lies the virtue of observing the way ruins convey meaning over time. For example, a ruin could be characterized by terms like “archaic” or “antique,” purportedly objective representational categories. At some other point in time, the same ruin could be repositioned, conversely, as a harbinger of technological modernity. It is the reappearance of ruins that I am concerned with, and the signaling capacity of various transpositions of ruins—in this case, Mesoamerican ruins via a style of Art Deco architecture called Mayan Revivalism. For American imaginaries of ruination, Maya ruins in particular have become unusual ciphers for understanding the notion of empire unique to the United States. Transpositions of Mesoamerican aesthetics in U.S. fine arts and architecture during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries point to some of the ways the politics of nationhood and expansion were founded on fragmented conceptions about indigeneity. These conceptions are partly situated in the mythic inscription of American antiquity in U.S. consciousness. Looking principally at Mayan Revivalism as a case in point, it becomes apparent that the role of Mesoamerican antiquity in the national imagination of American architectural modernism is inextricably linked to...
this phenomenon. This essay explores nuances of the technological in Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollywood projects of the 1910s and 20s, a key time period because of the modernizing ethos in U.S. cultural production. To a degree, the anachronistic introjection of the ancient-qua-modern is nothing new—one need look no further than Arthur Rimbaud's postulate that “the ‘absolutely modern’ is bound to the desire for the ‘absolutely primitive.’”2 Even so, the contradictions of modernity took on a different life as they were juxtaposed with optimism in the promise of technology.

Wright holds a key position in the development of hegemonic narratives about American modern architecture during the early decades of the twentieth century. In California, however, an exceptional episode occurred in his architectural practice. He turned away from the tenets of architectural modernism—which privileged sleek surfaces and an absence of ornamentation—and instead adopted an aesthetic clearly poached from a strange admixture of ancient Mesoamerican and other influences. Completed between 1921 and 1924, Wright’s Hollyhock House, Millard House (“La Miniatura”), Storer House, Ennis House, and Freeman House were to become iconic examples of Mayan Revivalism. However, Wright denied any architectural affinities between his designs and their ancient counterparts, claiming instead that “there never was an exterior influence upon my work either foreign or native, other than that of lieber meister [Louis Sullivan], Denkmar Adler, John Roebling, Whitman and Emerson, and the great poets worldwide. My work is original not only in fact but in spiritual fiber . . . as far as the Incas, the Mayans, even the Japanese—all to me were splendid confirmation.”3 Rather, he used the blocky, pyramidal forms and decorative motifs of these buildings to showcase the newest in concrete casting technologies. He also claimed they fulfilled the need for an organic modernist architecture to compete with the regionally popular Mission and Spanish Revival styles of the American Southwest. Though writings on Wright are some of the most prolific in the shelves of any architecture library, there seems to be the least consensus about this particular period. Settled as he is into a seemingly distinct configuration of modernism comprised of his affiliations with the Prairie School and the tenets of organic architecture, Wright's engagement with Mesoamerican aesthetics also represents a number of cultural and political phenomena that challenge the hegemonic historicization of his practice. Re-examining the genealogy of Maya ruins as they appear in the U.S. during the passage of the nineteenth century into the twentieth highlights the ambiguity surrounding these projects and sheds light on Wright's counterintuitive melding of the latest in machine age fabrication technologies with ancient aesthetics.

Some years earlier than Wright’s initial forays with Mayan Revivalism, the first plaster replicas of Maya ruins were displayed in the World's Columbian Exposition at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Six facades were cast from
paper molds collected by archaeologist Edward Thompson. Thompson’s massive casts populated a portion of the anthropological Midway section of the fair. The structures were grouped in such a way to indicate the superiority of Maya antiquity over the “semi-civilized” exhibits of native North American dwellings and separate altogether from the other, more “exotic” features of the Midway zone. They did not, however, supersede the fair’s civilizational zenith—the White City. Thus the fair’s organizers established a neat continuity from exhibits of the most “primitive” and peripheral cultures, located at the outskirts of the fair, to the U.S., positioned as the most “advanced” civilization at the center. The spatially centralized White City, with its neoclassical structures, was emblematic of U.S. achievement and suggestive of the ways that Anglo-America was positioned as culturally and technologically superior to other civilizations.

The Chicago fair was part of a larger narrative continuous with the historical unfolding of the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth, during which expansionist tendencies segued into Progressivist narratives and the concordant desire for industrial prowess. In the United States, the Progressive Era gave birth to a brand of modernization that foregrounded technological optimism aside social evolution. The latter included a notion of the indigene “as part of a timeless ‘national heritage’ whose living exemplars have disappeared or are in the process of disappearing through ‘modernizing.’” Yet this particularity of U.S. modernist ideology runs deeper than its appearance at the fin-de-siècle. Half a century before the casts debuted in the U.S., President Martin Van Buren appointed U.S. travel writer John Lloyd Stephens and architectural draftsman Frederick Catherwood for the first jointly diplomatic and archaeological U.S. expedition of its kind to Central America, which at the time was in a state of political upheaval. In 1839, the year Stephens and Catherwood commenced their first expedition, geopolitics played a particularly important role in the newly independent Mexico and pre-Civil War United States. During the years leading up to the Mexican-American War, American cultural imperialism in the appointment of figures like Stephens paralleled the activities of Manifest Destiny and the neo-imperialist Monroe Doctrine. The U.S. wasted no time in procuring a non-domestic, yet hemispheric origin story of its own akin to the classical civilizations of Western Europe—one fit for a fledgling world power but at a comfortable distance from the systematic erasure of the American Indian in domestic politics. Stephens and Catherwood were not only the first to document Maya ruins for U.S. audiences, but were also among the first and certainly the most recognized in U.S. circles in attributing the ruins to indigenous rather than migratory or “Old World” builders, thereby laying claim to a period of hemispheric American antiquity that deeply satisfied the nationalistic desires of a growing country.

Both before and after Stephens and Catherwood published their find-
ings, a number of incoherent and imaginative tales of origin had and would continue to proliferate. Yet Stephens’ origin story is itself confused, shuttling between a romanticized notion of the indigene as timeless forebearer of a grandiose past and the racialized, modernist rhetoric of social Darwinism. U.S. architecture in the early decades of the twentieth century was likewise fraught—arrested between the nostalgia of revivalism or eclecticism and the clean aesthetics of the modern. Maya ruins functioned as a space of projection for the fears and desires of a growing nation fraught with modernity and intermittently at odds with its neighbor to the south. Thus Stephens and Catherwood’s documentation and later reappearances of the ruins like the 1893 replicas also prefigured the first appearances of Mayan Revivalism in the 1910s.

Tracing influences on Wright’s Mayan Revival projects is a mystifying task because of his disavowal of any “exotic” influences on his work. Catherwood’s drawings were still widely available and quite popular during Wright’s early career. Moreover, Wright had certainly visited the Chicago World’s Fair since he was professionally involved as Sullivan’s apprentice, but this hardly explains the extent of his rather sudden and intense engagement with Mayan Revivalism in the 1910s. A more likely source of direct influence—an event, like the Chicago fair, in which a great deal of Wright’s contemporaries were implicated—was the Maya exhibit at the 1915 Panama-California International Exposition that Wright visited with industrial designer Alfonso Iannelli; the same year, Wright designed both the proto-Mayan Revival A.D. German Warehouse in Wisconsin and the Hollyhock House for oil heiress Aline Barnsdall. The exposition included a range of sculptures cast from the monuments at Palenque, sculptural reliefs “portraying scenes of Maya life” by Jean Beman Smith and a number of architectural models that represented, in the words of William Henry Holmes, the “highest achievements of aboriginal America—the work of the Maya race.”

In the footsteps of the 1893 fair, the 1915 Exposition in San Diego also celebrated U.S. technological capability. The newly completed Panama Canal was touted, like the White City, as the symbolic center of human achievement; the artistic and architectural works of the ancient Maya—a civilization still popularly described at the time as mysteriously vanished—were situated as proto-innovators in the lineage of said undertaking. The idea of progress was firmly inscribed in the fair, and the ancient Maya were ripe for the picking. Mexico’s brand of nationalism favored the Aztecs of Central Mexico in its story of national heritage, while the U.S. celebration of Maya achievements not only partially justified the U.S. presence in Central America in the decades preceding the construction of the canal, but was also utterly convenient for Progressivist narratives which Wright took up in his writings about architecture.

Interestingly, though the aesthetics he engaged were clearly borrowed,
Wright utilized neither the technologies nor the materials of the Maya. In lieu of the carefully hewn stone and stucco that ancient Mesoamericans had used to build their monumental religious, political and cultural centers, Wright used what was a brand new technology at the time—the textile block, or “knit-block” construction method. For this method, uniform blocks of cast concrete were “knit” together with steel supports. In the years following the 1915 exposition, Wright completed four of his Mayan Revival residences in the textile block format—the Millard, Freeman, Storer and Ennis houses. Wright, however, committed a blunder. Under the auspices of an organic approach to the landscape, he instructed his fabricators to use sand excavated from the building sites to mix into the concrete. Today, though Mesoamerican ruins such as Palenque have endured in some cases for millennia, Wright’s buildings—once thought to be hallmarks of technological innovation—have fallen into ruin themselves. The Ennis House, still celebrated as one of Wright’s most unique and magnificent constructions, has become an insurance and restoration nightmare, and sits amongst the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s eleven most endangered sites. Portions of the building’s decorative exterior have been buffed out and re-cast in recent years, but the building overall has deteriorated significantly. Though it appears as the anachronistic embodiment of fantastic architecture from the future in Ridley Scott’s 1982 sci-fi film, Blade Runner, it has been in a state of nearly irreparable ruin for decades. The vision of protagonist Deckard’s apartment conforms to the routine imagination of the future from the aesthetics of an “Othered” past—in this case, the aesthetics of ancient Mesoamericans.

Maya ruins are not wholly inscribed in the popular consciousness through the example of Catherwood’s drawings, Wright’s Los Angeles buildings or their reappearances in Hollywood cinema. Maya decorative motifs (or what were thought to be “Mayan”) also surfaced in the early decades of the twentieth century in examples like the Mayan Theatre in Los Angeles and other exploits in Mayan Revivalism—architect and Mayaphile Robert Stacy-Judd’s misnamed Aztec Hotel, for example. The Mayan theatres of the early twentieth century were hyperboles of Wright’s iterations of Mayan Revivalism—exotically themed and based on very little in the way of actual stylistic citations. Theatres—the ultimate spaces of projected fantasy to showcase the newly democratized medium of cinema—were dressed up in a strange iteration of “form follows function,” the famed dictum of Louis Sullivan, Wright’s predecessor. In theatres, the projected dreams of cinema met decoration, and thus aesthetic fantasies of exotic civilizations became fodder for decorative elements. These unwieldy conglomerates of any and all aesthetics of the “Other” make up a kitsch twentieth century version of some of the earliest misrecordings of Maya ruins. Many eighteenth and nineteenth century European artists relied on familiar conventions of representation. Without the cognitive
vocabulary to understand what were essentially alien aesthetic forms, European explorers such as Jean-Frédéric Waldeck illustrated Maya figures using a decidedly “Egyptianesque” stylization. The Orientalist lens is one example through which many of the early illustrators of Maya forms quite literally saw the subjects of their study.

At the same time that the fashionable Le Corbusian modernism and the optimism in new materials and construction technologies dawned in the architectural ethos of the West, the gravity of kitsch, typified by art deco architecture, was problematically inscribed into architectural history. Though supposedly at odds, both high architectural modernism and Art Deco represented instantiations of what had been critical metaphors for the nineteenth century. The simplistic forms of the modern were conceived as universalizing—free of the violence of inexorable human achievement. For the decorative arts, on the contrary, the stylings of genres like Mayan Revivalism represented romanticized conceptions of “lost” heritage. Wright’s Mayan Revival projects sit somewhere between the two, containing traces of both tendencies. Francisco Cornejo and Stiles O. Clements, collaborators on Los Angeles’s Mayan Theatre, were architect-designers of the more spectacular or simulacral variety. Yet Wright’s romanzas (a term he used to describe his Mayan Revival buildings) are contradictions—strange loci of the coalescence of California’s blossoming regionalism with the modernist drive toward universalism. Anxieties about modernization at the fin-de-siècle even had a substantial influence on the nascent category of the archaic between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. High art and architecture sought out categorical affirmation by occlusion—occlusion, that is, of the archaic and its occasional comrade-in-arms, the “primitive.” Yet the same hand that set apart or swept away the archaic and the primitive also grasped and digested them into the aesthetic conventions of modernism. Afflicted with the impulse to overwrite instantiations of decorative revivalist architecture as, in Le Corbusier’s words, “intolerable witnesses to a dead spirit,” architectural modernism meanwhile absorbed it.

The nuances of the technological in Mayan Revivalism are a story of modernist contradiction as much as they are a tale of technology’s indistinct inscription in the cultural production of the early twentieth century. Half a century later, in September of 1970, David Antin wrote a review of the Art and Technology program at LACMA. He problematized the notion of the technological in American consciousness, tracing it in part to Wright’s foregrounding of the machine as, in Wright’s words, the “the forerunner of democracy’ and ‘the normal tool of civilization.’” Antin explained that: “The identification of technology with ‘the machine’ and ‘the machine’ with ‘democracy’ was more or less typical of early reformatarian attitudes toward technological art; and the identification of technology with the machine was nearly inevitable. The machine was the concrete metaphor of technology—the physical em-
bodiment of the ability to get something from here to there.” Wright remains arguably the most famous architect in American history, yet from a technical standpoint, his attempt to marry the principles of organicism with new technologies in his Mayan Revival projects failed.

The foregrounding of technology during the early decades of the twentieth century was hardly an isolated phenomenon from either a disciplinary or geographic standpoint. Wright’s implementation of new casting techniques in his California projects was also neatly bracketed by innovations in archaeology taking place in southern Mexico between approximately 1910 and 1930. During this period, Mexican nationalist and archaeologist Manuel Gamio pioneered the use of stratigraphy as a new method for dating ancient structures. Not only was the pursuit of technological prowess mirrored across disciplines and circulated between the U.S. and Mexico, but so was the influence of Wright. By the 1930s, Wright’s work was gaining increasing traction amongst some of the forerunners of Mexican architectural modernism and the Indigenismo movement, including Luis Barragán, architect of the Jardines del Pedregal, and German-Mexican architect Max Cetto. Famed Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and architect Juan O’Gorman were also drawn to the “ideological potential” of Wright’s expressions of organicism. This attraction materialized in O’Gorman’s 1944 (Mesoamerican revival) design for the Anahuacalli Museum, a building to house Rivera’s collection of pre-Columbian artifacts. In his final chapter of Mythologies, Roland Barthes describes mythology as a study of “ideas-in-form” and myth itself as the product of a second order sign system. From this standpoint, the attention of the Mexican indigenistas to the figure of Wright is a testament to the mythic potential of his architectural oeuvre. Beyond (and before) Wright, however, exist various mythologies of ruination of which Maya ruins constitute only a small subset of source material. Wright is thus a cog in the enigmatic genealogy of one particular form of myth intimately tied to conceptions of modernity and indigeneity in American consciousness. Between the mid-nineteenth century and Mayan Revivalism, the imaginative transmogrifications of Maya ruins began to function as mythic entities malleable to the needs of a burgeoning empire: for the siting of hemispheric antiquity to rival that of the “Old World,” for the achievement of critical distance from the “problem” of indigenous populations on domestic soil, and even, in the early decades of the twentieth century, as rife with the optimism of modernity-quas-technology. Mayan Revival architecture is a key example that illustrates not only the promiscuity of modernism, but also the constantly renegotiated terms of the U.S. relationship to its indigenous past.
NOTES

1 Gustavio Verdesio describes “ruin gazing” as the process through which ruins come to be seen as objects of study. Verdesio takes the term a step further, to indicate a gaze he identifies as a colonial or neo-colonial one—“that is so because of the way in which the gaze resignifies and therefore appropriates the space where an Other or Others once lived.” See “Invisible at a Glance: Indigenous Cultures of the Past, Ruins, Archaeological Sites and Our Regimes of Visibility,” in Ruins of Modernity, eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönlé (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 343-344.

2 See Rainer Rumold, “Archeo-logies of Modernity in ‘Transition’ and ‘Documents’ 1929/30,” Comparative Literature Studies 37, no. 1 (2000): 45. Rumold explains further: “The primitivist vision provided the intoxication of forgetting the burden of conceptual, historical and moral memory, and it freed the intellect for a critique of Western rationalist subjectivity. ‘Absolutely modern’ was the vantage point of a radically aesthetic relation to the world, the aesthetic experience being for Nietzsche the ‘essential,’ ‘metaphysical activity of life,’ for Gottfried Benn the ‘final’ metaphysical activity, for Rimbaud, later Dada or in Oswald Spengler’s scheme of decadence, the stage before a debunking of art altogether.”


4 For a detailed account of Maya ruins at the fair, see R. Tripp. Evans’s epilogue in Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination 1820-1915 (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), 153-62.


9 Ibid.

10 See Keith Eggener, “Towards an Organic Architecture in Mexico,” in Frank Lloyd Wright: Europe and Beyond, ed. Anthony Alofsin (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 166-178. Eggener quotes O’Gorman stating his view of Wright as “the supreme architect of the century” in Clive Banham Smith’s 1967 text, Builders in the Sun: Five Mexican Architects. O’Gorman perceived that “many of his [Wright’s] buildings, definitely influenced by ancient, pre-Hispanic Mexico, are the best examples of American architecture. . . . It was Wright, a frequent visitor to our archaeological sites, who understood organic architecture as related to the human being in his geographical and historical content” (see pp. 176-177).
Check Fire in Tikrit, Iraq

*for Jeremy Kennard*

James Deitz

“Fire Mission”
The Forward Observer called in
Mortar men ran to the gun
The Section Sergeant yells “Section.”
“Deflection. 4567, elevation 1345
One round HE Quick. Charge One.”
The Gunner screamed “Hang it

Fire!”

30 Seconds to impact
The American mortar unit waited
as the 120 round propels higher
25 Seconds
It was too late
The FO’s coordinates were wrong
20 Seconds
The mortar round targeted a civilian house
not a bomb maker’s shop
15 Seconds
Too late
An Iraqi family
A girl, her mother, her father
10 Seconds

The dog chained outside
asleep in the late October morning
5 Seconds

Everything within 50 square yards
Incinerated

The FO called “Check Fire”
It was supposed to be a show of force mission
One of these soldiers laughs
The others laugh too
It was easier
Aren’t all Arabs bad?
What would others say?
To cry would be too
late   Too hard   Too real to show

Now the veteran carries a patch
A laughing skull with wings within a spade
At the base, a cluster of tiny blood tears
3 red tears on the patch of his backpack.
The hotel cast gridded windows on the Atlantic blue gaslighting, the pier where fishermen would set their rods in concrete pockets. We sat in the sand, watched the unbuckling of dutiful morning tackle, listened to the thud of red, empty igloo coolers.
I am contemplating suicide—the different ways I could commit it and the ways in which I could die easily without having to put too much effort into it. The act of suicide seems so desperate, but the thinking of it only a little less so. I am paralyzed by a desire to let go coupled with an embarrassment that I could fall apart so easily and be so unwilling to keep going.

I am in bed early this night, thinking of this, unable to sleep, when I hear a knock at the door. I open it and a man stands in front of me. His eyes are big and inviting—not friendly, really, but maybe passionate.

He says he is here to save me. I tell him that I wasn’t actually going to do it. I was just thinking about it. But I am a bit confused as to how he could know what I had been thinking. No, no, he says. He tells me, that’s not what he means at all. He tells me he’s from the future. From a future where I die a most painful and horrific death and he couldn’t bear it any more—seeing my death playing over and over again in his head. So he came here to the past to save me. I invite him inside, because I’m not sure what else to do with a man who is from the future.

I offer him a cup of tea, but he refuses. He can’t be sure if that would lead to anything catastrophic. I must be like a fly on the wall, he tells me. That seems strange because he is here and trying to save me, but I’m sure he knows more about time traveling than me. I ask him how far in the future is he from. I can’t be sure, he says. It’s not an exact science. I willed myself to find you somewhere in your past and so I wound up here. It’s fascinating, really, that it could even
be possible. Even if he is showing up to save me from a future accident, he is placed at a time to save me from the thoughts I am having in the present. I can't be sure, but that seems like fate, bundled up on my doorstep. After so much has been taken away from me—after everything recently feels like that clot of blood flushed down the toilet—it is nice to have someone directly in front of me. Someone who is not trying to run away from possibilities that are no longer even possible. This man faces all the possibilities head on, I think.

_How do I die?_ I ask him. He shakes his head. He is so somber. So burdened with the weight of this knowledge—this knowledge of my life and my death—but he says he cannot tell me that. _It is violent_ is all he says. He looks at me and I can see tears in his eyes. _You are so beautiful_ he says. _I didn't notice that when you were dying, but you really are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen._ He emphasizes 'thing;' but I don't realize this until much later. I focus on his tears and his desperate need to save me. I feel warm and safe, at ease with the beauty he says he sees in me.

He tells me his name is O. He tells me he is very tired and I have him follow me into my bed. We spend a month together, learning how my head fits perfectly against the cavity of his chest and his mind is at peace when his hands rest against the small of my back. I forget that he's from the future and I cannot imagine myself anywhere but with him. Sometimes he puts his head on my stomach as if listening for something. I tell him it's not worth the trouble; I will always be empty. But he tells me he is not listening to anything but the noises of my body. He cannot imagine a more perfect music.

We go one night to a bar and he sees a man in the corner of the room. I see O watching the man intently. The man is young, maybe just barely old enough to be in the bar. He is drinking a beer alone and seems distraught. O, never taking his eyes off the young man, tells me that this is what he came here for. He reminds me of his future, my future—the one I had forgotten in the moments spent with him. I am upset because I thought he had come here to be with me, that he had saved me just by being here. But apparently, this is not the case. I do not tell O that I am upset.

O walks to the end of the long bar where the man sits in the corner. He whispers something in the man's ear and has the man follow him out of the crowded bar into an alley. I follow behind them, trying to remain unnoticed. In the alley, under the one dim light, O beats the man until he is dead—the thudding echoes of O's fists vibrate over my body. He turns to me, knowing that I watched the whole thing. He smiles and tells me that this is the man who kills me in the future. O explains that it is he who kills me in the future (that the young man was him in the past). _I don't understand. If you killed yourself from the past how can you-from-the-future still be here?_ I say. He kisses me, then slams me into the brick wall of the alley. _You'll never understand time travel_ he tells me.
Poetry

The Wine I Saved for You

Ian T. Kennedy

You were with me when I got it
“You should come by and drink it with me,” I said
And so it sat in my fridge, waiting. You didn’t
come
and I didn’t mention it

I would open the fridge door and
seeing it
I knew it was yours and thought of you fondly
There’s no reason to think you ever considered
my invitation again

After a few months I opened the bottle
with someone else.
It was strange watching her drink the wine
carelessly ignorant
that it was yours
Anamesa
Contrasts in Cambodia
Digital photograph
Camille Louise Maupas-Oudinot
Deconstruction of Mirrors

Digital photograph

Camille Louise Maupas-Oudinot
memories of encounters that never happened (series title)
“No matter how high he learned to jump, he settled with the knowledge that it would never be as high as a ferris wheel.”
Film photography swap
Emily Jarvis, Isabella Brandalise, Luiz Lula
The American Dream - Genesis 3:24
Archival pigment print

Bin Feng
The Weight of a Man
Needlepoint on linen canvas with cotton thread

Holly Day
You Can't Take That Away From Me
Performance & photography

Sichong Xie
YOGĀCĀRIN &
MĀDHYAMIKA

James Bradley

SCENE:
A teaching hall in Conventional Reality

YOGĀCĀRIN:
First question all things
'Til naught survives
But mind which
Questions
Aught

MĀDHYAMIKA:
Answers will rush in
Like maggots will
Infest raw
Rotting
Meat

BOTH (IN UNISON):
Serenely the mind's
Dilating holes
Will blot out
The whole
Site
Permanently Inked
Jewish Masochism and the Zealous Prohibition Against Voluntary Tattoos

Gabi Schaffzin

The traditional Jewish prohibition against being voluntarily tattooed originates in Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 28: “You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord.” Contemporarily, cultural publications such as newspapers and magazine articles correctly cite the line from Leviticus as the source for the prohibition. It is sometimes accompanied by a reference to the mythological law that tattooed Jews cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Indeed, it has been this author’s experience that discovery of his tattoos by an interlocutor often provoke an inquiry regarding his burial plans. This connection is unfounded in Jewish law.

The source of the burial myth is unknown. However, this study is more interested in why this particular legal misconception has become as widespread as it has. Certainly, there are innumerable other myths in Judaism, as in any religion. The tattoo myth, however, is notably linked to the specific and severe punishment of improper burial. In contrast, Jews are not told that condom use or male masturbation (both transgressions of the halakha against wasting one’s seed) will result in expulsion from any community institution—cemetery or otherwise.

In fact, condom use has been declared acceptable by more-liberal denominations of Judaism and multitudes of other compromises have been
made by rabbinical assemblies across many denominations. Homosexuality, for instance, still a highly debated topic from the Judeo-Christian canon, has become more acceptable to some religious authorities. Tattooing, however, remains strictly prohibited within all denominations of Judaism. While both tattooing and homosexuality have become more common on a broader cultural level, the tattoo prohibition within contemporary Jewish understanding of the halakha is marked by unique zealously.

In what follows, I will offer an explanation for contemporary Judaism’s unwillingness to accept voluntary permanent tattooing, even as the practice becomes more popular among younger Jews themselves. The tattoo’s significance in the Holocaust is a necessary framework for understanding the Jew’s relationship to the complicated tale of his people’s oppression, rebellion, submission, and dominance. Poststructuralism offers helpful concepts for this analysis. Of particular interest is the cultural production that accompanies oscillations between exiled subject and dominating power—especially when viewed through the lens of Gilles Deleuze’s writing on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, known as the “father” of masochism. By choosing this lens, we can explore the practice of tattooing in general, and particularly see that a masochistic tendency is present in the history of Judaism.

**Tattooing and the Holocaust**

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, Nazi prisoners were only tattooed at one location, the Auschwitz complex in Poland. When the influx of Soviet prisoners in 1941 overwhelmed SS authorities’ system of sewing serial numbers onto prison uniforms, the camp guards turned to tattooing serial numbers directly onto prisoners’ arms. Being thus branded was part of the deterritorializing regime used by the Nazis against the Jews and other oppressed populations. Removed from their homes, forced to speak German, thrown into cattle cars, transported many miles from their homeland, and incarcerated (if not immediately exterminated), the actions inflicted on the Jews and other victims shared an insidious goal: to create people without nations in order to remove them from earth in a state of exception. The active removal of the Jews from their communities was deterritorializing in both the geographic sense and as understood by Deleuze and Guattari in their work. Specifically, the attempt at psychological breakage and moving anti-semitism and racism from de facto to de jure practice are explicitly deterritorializing. They seek to alienate and defamiliarize the Jew from his everyday comfort. Ironically, Deleuze and Guattari first used the term in this sense describing Kafka’s production of literature in a minor language—the author wrote in German while living in Prague—and the defamiliarizing effect this had on
his work. Others have tied the term more closely to the genocidal effects that settler imperialism had: Norbert Finzsch quotes Raphael Lemkin’s definition of genocide as “a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves.”

The tattooing practice—and at its base the assignment of serial numbers—are examples of deterritorialization. Hitler was, in essence, using those mechanisms to reterritorialize, to re-assign the Jew as a critical cog in his “solution”, wherein he “fixes” the world for Aryans by ridding it of the inferior races. “From the beginning in 1942,” writes Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, in Auschwitz and the Lagers [camps] under its jurisdiction (in 1944 they were about forty) prisoner registration numbers were no longer only sewed to the clothes but tattooed on the left forearm…men were tattooed on the outside of the arm and women on the inside…The operation was not very painful and lasted no more than a minute, but it was traumatic. Its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark, you will never leave here, this is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to the slaughter, and that is what you have become. You no longer have a name; this is your new name. The violence of the tattoo was gratuitous, an end in itself, pure offense.

At around 400,000, the number of tattooed Auschwitz prisoners was quite small compared to the total number of Holocaust victims and survivors. However, especially for the 135,000 Jewish survivors of Auschwitz, Holocaust memory is inseparable from the tattoos. The deterritorializing power of the camps has forced its way into contemporary Jewish culture, making unacceptable those practices which seemed to represent the traumas experienced by Hitler’s victims—in particular, tattooing.

Jews With Tattoos

In spite of this traumatic history, as well as in defiance of religious prohibition and cultural taboo, tattooing has increased in popularity over the past two decades among Jews—both in Israel and in the Diaspora. One notable example is Marina Vainshtein, featured in a Los Angeles Times article on non-traditional expressions of religious faith by contemporary American Jewry. The content of the tattoos are in particular noteworthy. Vanshtein’s body-covering tattoos depict graphic images of the Holocaust. In her essay, “The Tattooed Jew”, written five years after the Time piece, Debora Apel details:

On [Vainshtein’s] upper back, the central image represents a train transport carrying Jewish prisoners in striped uniforms toward waiting ovens. Smoke billows above the train cars while a swastika, repre-
sent in negative space, wafts through the ashes that are spewed forth by a crematorium chimney.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, Vanshtein’s body acts as the canvas for her own Holocaust memorial. This is not a unique practice among Jews generationally removed from the horrors of the Holocaust. Apel’s article also quotes Joshua Burgin, a Jew struggling with other people’s criticism that his Star of David tattoo is disrespectful to survivors of Auschwitz: “For me to take the Star of David as a Jewish symbol of identity and mark myself permanently with it, makes me feel more Jewish than I ever felt before.”\textsuperscript{18} In a more recent example, Yardena Schwartz, working for the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, visited the Israel Tattoo Convention, held in Tel Aviv for the past two years. Featuring “more than 50 tattoo artists and thousands of body art enthusiasts,” the conference has attempted to establish itself onto equal footing as similar European conferences. During her visit to 2014’s inaugural convention, Schwartz interviewed a number of active participants in the Tel Aviv tattoo scene. She spoke with Shay Daudi, co-founder of the convention, once scolded by a Holocaust survivor who had accompanied her grandchildren into his parlor. “I didn’t know what to say. And then I told her [that] she [got her tattoo] by default for bad reason. Now your grandchildren do it for good reason, they choose to do it. Then I told her it’s going to be like closure, so a bad thing to a good thing.”\textsuperscript{19}

The subject-matter of the tattoos that the survivor’s grandchildren were getting is unclear in this case. There are, however, well documented cases of children and grandchildren of Auschwitz survivors having their relatives’ tattoos replicated on their own arms. A 2012 New York Times article highlights a few such instances, including Eli Sagir, whose grandfather was a prisoner at Auschwitz.

“All my generation knows nothing about the Holocaust,” said Ms. Sagir, 21, who has had the tattoo for four years. “You talk with people and they think it’s like the Exodus from Egypt, ancient history. I decided to do it to remind my generation: I want to tell them my grandfather’s story and the Holocaust story.”

After she came home with the tattoo, Sagir’s mother, brother, and uncle followed suit.

In Burgin, Vanshetin, Daudi, and Sagir we see efforts to cope by at once remembering and moving on. Burgin has “committed himself” to the “burdened history” of the Jews, Vanshtein has marked herself with grotesque truths from the camps, Sagir wishes to teach others as much as to remind herself, and Daudi sees the general practice as an opportunity for closure. If, as Deleuze and Guatarri argue in \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, reterritorialization and deterritorialization occur simultaneously, then the use of the tattoo by Jewish youth is similar to Kafka’s decision to use a language more familiar to him than his Czech neighbors: these tattoos are for the tattooed—explicitly
counter to the Holocaust markings done solely for the benefit of the ruling despot. These tattooed individuals are expressing the wish to reclaim the act of being tattooed—to remove it (or, perhaps more appropriately, to deterritorialize it) from the machinations of the Nazis and reterritorialize their connection to their community through the act of having artwork or messages of their choosing tattooed on their own terms.

Reactions from Holocaust survivors themselves vary. Daudi’s survivor/critic seemed to agree with his assertion that her grandchildren were finding closure through their tattoos. Sagir’s grandfather “bent his head to kiss it.” On the other hand, Ron Folman had his father’s numbers tattooed onto his arm and received a negative reaction: “We were absolutely against it,” [his father] Yeshayahu recalled. “You are putting a burden on your children that has to do with the Holocaust!”

The organizers of the Israel Tattoo Convention estimate that attendance has increased each year. Of course, not all of the imagery being etched into Israeli skin is Holocaust—or even religiously or nationally—related. According to sociologist Oz Almog, “Few if any [Israelis] today would etch patriotic symbols into their skin, but dolphins, dragons and ‘just anything’ are much in demand.” A non-Holocaust related tattoo on a Jew cannot be dismissed as just that—rather, regardless of subject-matter, the tattoo itself carries weight as a signifier in Jewish culture due to its strong connection to Holocaust experience and imagery.

**Masochism and Judaism**

In seeking to understand why the contemporary prohibition against tattooing so strongly persists, it is helpful to explore theories that take into consideration issues of guilt, punishment, and voluntary affliction. Masochism offers a particularly clear frame for exploring this aspect of Jewish experience.

Throughout his 1967 *Coldness and Cruelty*, the philosopher Deleuze argues that sadism and masochism should be separated to be properly understood—a challenge to Freud’s combination of the two into one perversion. Richard von Krafft-Ebing had brought the two terms into the fore of psychiatric thought in 1886, 20 years previous to Freud’s theory of perversion. As theorist Blair McDonald notes, “Deleuze’s conception of masochism makes a case for desire as productive and creative; conducive of frameworks rather than restrictive.” Of particular interest to this study is the Deleuzian masochist’s relationship with his torturer, with the law, and with pain.

The masochist, writes Deleuze, thinks “in terms of contracted alliance.” This alliance is certainly predicated on a master-slave relationship and built through cooperation. As the writer of this contract, the masochist “is essentially an educator,” guiding his (ideally unwilling or, at the very least, skept-
tical) torturer through what sort of contractual stipulations will bring him the most pleasure.\textsuperscript{29} “The masochist aims not to mitigate the law,” he writes, “but on the contrary to emphasize its extreme severity.”\textsuperscript{30} Law here, it seems, may also be understood beyond the juridical: early on in Coldness, Deleuze notes that the masochist obsesses over the mystical nature of a naked woman’s body, tying it back to the subject’s preoccupation with “historical and cultural confirmation in mystical or idealistic initiation rites.”\textsuperscript{31} Rites and ritual are key tenents to the masochistic contracts, as they “epitomize the world of fantasy.”\textsuperscript{32} Adherence to these rituals, of course, result in the masochist’s torturer complying with her part of the contract: she inflicts pain and punishment. This irony is not lost on Deleuze (nor on the masochist, for that matter) who labels the subject “insolent in his obsequiousness, rebellious in his submission; in short he is a humorist, a logician of consequences.”\textsuperscript{33} Masochistic pleasure is not about pain or suffering directly. Rather, it is about the terms—literally—of the torture.

**Jews as Masochists**

As one begins to consider Deleuzian masochism in the context of Judaism, a number of familiar tropes come to the fore. For instance, the emphasis on repetition and oscillation in *Coldness and Cruelty* evokes the cycle in the book of Judges: apostasy by the Israelites leads God to bring upon them the punishment at the hands of an enemy—be it through war, exile, or both. The people repent, crying out to God for help, who sends a judge in order to restore order and ensure that the populace rededicates itself to the Lord’s teachings. This cycle oscillates between pain and pleasure, rejection and repentance, fantasy and reality. The Deuteronomist author of the book of Judges establishes a cultural trope here that the Jews must be subservient to the law (that is, a master, or God) in order to proliferate. This trope guides us through eras of Israelite exile and reclamation of Judaea, cultural production and religious practice—all the while following a pattern of oscillation between submission and rebellion.

In his 1997 work, *Eros and the Jews*, David Biale writes of the Haskalah\textsuperscript{34}, or the Jewish Enlightenment. Its fictional Jewish “antiheroes wallowed in self-pity...at a time when Jews were taking up arms and organizing politically in their own defense, the predominant fiction that they produced...expressed impotence and pessimism.”\textsuperscript{35} Even while the crucial Jewish action was characterized by an aggression and dominance, the prevailing cultural conceit was passive and submissive. However, if the Jew who stayed in Russia to fight the pogroms was left to feel impotent, then the strong Jew was the one who migrated to the Promised Land.
Tattooed as Masochists

Having established that masochism is a common thread throughout Jewish culture and its history, it is critical to return to the properties of Deleuzian masochism outlined previously. Thus, it becomes possible to consider if masochism is inherently present in the act of being tattooed. Remember that a masochist torturer should be unwilling or, at the very least, skeptical; this is simply not the case with a tattoo artist applying a tattoo. Further, the pain resulting from being tattooed—while certainly a focus of the decision to be tattooed as well as discussion after-the-fact—is minuscule compared to the longevity of the tattoo itself; while the pain of being tattooed may be present for minutes or hours, the pain is not the tattoo—the tattoo is the permanent ink in one's sub-dermal layer (important, too, to remember that a masochist seeks pain not for the sake of pain, but as a precondition to pleasure). Finally, obedience to the law is critical to the masochist (who is “rebellious in his submission”); even though tattooing is currently legal in most municipalities (and relatively recently—even New York City only officially legalized tattooing in 1997), there is obviously still a deep cultural disapproval of the act, leading to difficulty in procuring employment and other cultural handicaps.

Certainly, none of these points disqualify a tattooer-tattooed relationship from falling into the matrix of experience outlined by Deleuze. They do restrict us, however, from calling the choice of being tattooed a thoroughly masochistic act. That is, the tattooed are not tattooed simply because they are masochists. Instead, it is important to recall words like “closure” and “memorial”—terms used by Jews when they justify ignoring the religious prohibition. To this list, we might also add catharsis and visibility. Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe, in their 1992 essay, “Marked and Un(re)marked: Tattoo and Gender in Theory Narrative” explore the ways in which the male body is “read as generic” in the traditional canon of body-related text and theory. They reference Foucault, positing that tattoos offer an opportunity for the artist/theorist to connect the body itself with issues of cultural expression. For instance, they cite Foucault alongside a reading of Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony”:

Foucault describes the body as “the inscribed surface of events,” and the job of the genealogist as exposing “a body totally imprinted by history.” In Kafka’s penal colony this is effected by a torture machine: the ideals of the culture are concretized in a “sentence” pierced onto the flesh of individuals with needles. The text of culture which in other forms is difficult to make out and understand becomes clear to the condemned man: he “deciphers it with his wounds.” Thus, the materiality of the body makes language…into something which can be known and felt.

Following Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, our tattooed Jews are making their
history material—all of them, not just those being tattooed with historical imagery such as their grandparents’ Auschwitz numbers or illustrations of the gas chambers. Consider the Jew’s complex history: one composed of many struggles between exile and homeland, might and impotence, religion and secularism—a struggle that, to the twentieth and twenty-first century Jew, culminated in genocide followed almost immediately by the reclamation of a homeland. How can the modern Jew seek to understand this oscillatory history, especially with his body? As one of the major symbols of this genocide, the tattoo (no matter the form) is the Jew “deciphering his wounds.” He achieves a catharsis and a moving-on uncharacteristic of his people’s history. Therefore, the strong prohibition subsists: the masochist Jew’s wish not to move on, hoping to keep completed-pleasure at bay with a pain that the Jewish tattoo seeks to heal.

Conclusion

At the end of Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony”, the Traveler learns that the previous Commandant—the man who had built The Machine to inscribe literal sentences on the backs of the condemned repeatedly, leading to their slow death—was not allowed the privilege of a proper burial when he died. Instead, he was laid under the floor of the colony’s tea house. His few remaining followers left an inscription on his gravestone:

“Here rests the Old Commandant. His followers, who are now not permitted to have a name, buried him in this grave and erected this stone. There exists a prophecy that the Commandant will rise again after a certain number of years and from this house will lead his followers to a re-conquest of the colony. Have faith and wait!”

A monster, banished from the community to the point of a hidden burial plot. His followers, laying in wait to “re-conquest” the land. Kafka wrote “In the Penal Colony” two decades before the opening of Auschwitz, though certainly during a time of political turmoil in his homeland Europe. A secular Jew in a relatively hostile Prague, he used creative expression to reclaim his exilic status, writing in German while his neighbors spoke mostly Czech. And in his work we see patterns of exile and return, pain and relief, territorialization and deterritorialization.

Throughout greater Jewish history, we repeatedly see examples of the oscillation between pain and pleasure, the proliferation of Jewish submission to power within the output of cultural production, and a sacrificial dedication to the code of conduct—de jure or otherwise. It is of little surprise, then, that a practice like tattooing—one that seeks to provide a catharsis to the centuries of externally- and self-inflicted suffering—be so strongly shunned that a myth regarding one’s burial rights (that is, a consequence over which the tattooed transgressor can have no final say) be used as a threat.
Acceptance of general tattooing practices is certainly increasing, as demonstrated by a multitude of recent studies. Perhaps as the Baby Boomer apprehension towards tattoos is slowly replaced by the Generation-X-associated apathy, this shift will be reflected among the leaders of the Jewish community (though one wonders how far back this type of shift will lag, as there is currently no sign). This change may come instead from the currently nascent, albeit growing, Israeli tattoo industry; Jewish leaders may take their cue from the grandchildren of those who moved the religion's cultural center from Europe to Israel.

In the epilogue to Eros and the Jews, David Biale writes that he “argued throughout this book that the history of Jewish sexuality cannot be reduced to a monolithic message, either liberator or repressive.” Similarly, this study has not sought to provide a clear-cut definition of any of its key (albeit nebulous) themes: the acceptance of tattooing by Jews, Deleuzian masochism, the Jews as masochists, being tattooed as masochist. I do not explicitly call for a repeal of the ban on tattooing by Jews, as there are more critical issues to consider (acceptance of non-normative gender or sexuality identification, for instance). Instead, what precedes offers a reflection on seemingly overzealous prohibition to an issue—one without the cultural weight of, say, laws regarding who one may or may not marry—and attempts to understand this unnecessary zeal.

NOTES

1. See, for example Elgrably (1996)
2. Dorff and Newman, Jewish Choices, 16
10. In Homer Sacer, Giorgio Agamben argues that the camps operated in a state of exception: they used the bare life status of the prisoners to handicap humanity against the State's obvious illegal and immoral operations.
Schaffzin / Permanently Inked


13 Ibid. From Dr. Achim Gercke’s 1933 tretise, “Solving the Jewish Question”: “Everyone has seen that the current situation is intolerable. Allowing free development and equality for the Jews has led to an “unfree” situation of exploited competition, and to a handing over of important positions within the Ger-man people to those of a foreign race.”


16 The article references tattoo-related halakha, incorrectly including the burial myth as truth.


18 Ibid, 300.


27 Ibid.

28 In the tradition of *Coldness and Cruelty*, I will assign the masochist a male pronoun, while his torturer will be female.


31 Ibid, 21.

32 Ibid, 94.

33 Ibid, 89.

34 A period between the 1770s and 1880s when cultural production within the Jewish community pushed against the Hassidic tradition and the rabbis, community leaders who held the most cultural power at the time.


36 Deleuze, *Masochism*, 89.


38 Per a 2011 poll “31 percent of nearly 3,000 hiring managers said they would be less likely to promote someone with a visible tattoo” (McMullen).

Ibid., 146.


Biale, Eros, 229.
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**Gassho Attic**
**(Shirakawa-go, Japan)**

*Eleanor Paynter*

Ghost cocoons lined the shelves like soft eggs, like dozens of smaller-than-fist fates. An old woman’s silhouette swept back and forth by the window, back curled as if bowing in that house shaped like prayer, in the village where silk had outlasted paper, had outlasted guns. So soundlessly she brushed dust from the dark oak, she might have heard, years before, the faint hum as the last larvae spun the single thread that would have been their transformation, and was yet their pall.
Do Not Touch Me

Victor Xavier Zarour Zarzar

Years ago, in Greece, I saw a woman without a nose. 
One night she walked past me—
on a narrow flag-stoned street
in Mykonos. The gauze
dressing the cavity as impeccably
white as the brick houses around us.
I couldn’t bring myself to hold her star.
An askance look, quickly diverted—
too brief see what she was wearing,
or the color of her eyes or her hair,
or the way she swayed her hips
as she walked. I only saw
the gauze. I was embarrassed.
To have witnessed such vulnerability,
such a palpable lack, seemed almost indecent.
I couldn’t see myself in her.
It occurred to me that the Magdalene
tried to touch her savior
or cling to him outside the sepulcher,
but was held at bay by his mē mou haptou.
Could she see herself in him?
The woman was soon gone.
On the pier
that night, I tried to imagine if she could
be lured into that tiny blue bakery in the middle
of the highway that sold the flaky puff pastries.
Could she smell the millenary
salt of the Aegean?
The red mullets being
gutted by the Mykonians,
as a colony of avid gulls circled them overhead?
When I was the wind, I felt banished. So constantly cast across the waters of this planet. Lonely. Whirling and sprinting, feeling no progress but the rustling of some waves. Nothing to see but water and sky. Moving over water and sky, sky and water for days. I found fury out there so alone and empty, tightening and tightening. My hollowness balling up, swirling and rushing and growing. Cast across the water. Lost in a deep drive for that solid something I once left.

Land.

When I was the wind, sometimes, after long bouts of loneliness, I’d kiss land again not with the gentle lips I imagined, promised, but with lips of lust. Chaos. Of longing too long endured. Exile and excitement fermented into hateful pining. The leaves I once left would wave to me again. And I’d reach for them, the luscious treetops, and throttle them all bare.
What Can a Figurant Do?
A Fringe Speculation

B. B. Tabor

And either the wraith is saying or Gately is realizing that you can’t appreciate the dramatic pathos of a figurant until you realize how completely trapped and encaged he is in his mute peripheral status […]. No way for a figurant to win. No possible voice or focus for the encaged figurant.

—David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*

The figurant, “fractional actor,” human scenery, and support remains on the cusp between subject and object in works of art and in life. A figurant is a supernumerary character, appearing on stage or in a film, but without agency, who functions to build the overall aesthetic of a dramatic, cinematic, or choreographic work; it is a dramaturgical tool used to support the main characters and the narrative of a ballet or film. Those haunting characters in television, film, and dance are the ones we rarely remember. Yet, they fill the space of the image to a point where the aesthetics could potentially be discomfiting without them. The fractional actors are what support the scenes in theatre and dance. In dance, specifically ballet, the figurants are dancers who are dressed all alike and fill up the spaces on the edge of the stage. Their choreography is usually transitional and/or filler; their mass movement makes for a dynamic scene change and they allow the principles a break between the principle dancers’ tiring variations. These dancers are typically in the corps de ballet and as long as they are in that rank, they
Anamesa / Nonfiction

will likely never perform solos, duets, or even trios. The figurants aesthetically support ballet by adding to the spectacle of the show, but never showing off their individual talents. They are also pragmatically supportive to the other dancers who need breaks in order to put on their best performance. In film, if set extras were to disappear from a scene taking place in the streets of New York City, for example, the viewers would notice their absence immediately because it would be so counter to their experience of reality. Figurants phenomenologically support film by furnishing the scenes with their bodies and allowing viewers to feel as though the whole narrative is as close to reality as possible. When thinking about the figurant beyond the context of art, we realize that supernumerary characters figure in certain aspects of our personal lives. The people who surround us in our daily routines have their own narratives and produce multitude of being that constructs our condition of being in the world. For example, the figurants in our lives do act as supports to our consumer habits. They are the laborers who make the items we buy and the workers who then dispose of those items once they are of no use to us. In art and in life, we are not acutely aware of figurants. We rarely take note of each individual corps de ballet dancer. Likewise, we do not always remember cinematic extras; how many actors who are cast as extras in a film get stopped on the street and are recognized for their role in that Summer Blockbuster? When the boundary between art and life blurs, as it does so in performance art, think about how many times we actually notice or think about civic maintenance workers. Those men responsible for the upkeep of the cities we inhabit are often conflated with the detritus they dispose of. From these examples, it is clear that the people who occupy the periphery, whether in art or in life, go unnoticed so much so that it becomes easy to forget their individual subjectivity. In their anonymity they become objects left to be manipulated by the directors of the films and dances they appear in and by those of us who forget to look beyond ourselves and our individual plotlines. Understanding the figurant as an object of support is essential to answering the initial question of this essay: What is a figurant? Furthermore, the fact that a figurant is a human adds complexity to the ontology of the term and the systems in which it operates. When taking the humanity of a periphery object into account, I am able to explore and answer the second question of this essay: How is the art, and life, affected when the figurant moves into, or dances in, the spotlight? I aim to evaluate how we as viewers might conceptualize something that we actually do not notice—and often do not even notice that we are not noticing it. Our experience of the artwork and the experience of going about our daily routines is interrupted, but in a way the reconstructs how we view the world. When the figurant is able to come forward, a new level of awareness manifests itself in us. After examining the performativity of the figurant, I will go on to speculate a foreground figurant and the possibilities that it might open up in
In her book, *Social Works*, Shannon Jackson weaves together the disciplines of art history, theatre studies, and psychoanalysis through a dialogue with supportive, periphery objects. In her discussion of Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s performances, she is able to make the terms “ready-made,” “prop,” and “transitional object” dance together to help understand how these objects might function in the world. Each of these terms in Jackson’s writing develops into a definition of objects that support the overall infrastructure of art and society. In order to frame my essay within this paradigm, I propose to extend Jackson’s terminology by adding the term “figurant” from dance. The figurant is similar to the ready-made, prop, and transitional object in that it performatively provides support of art and art-life situations.

The figurant’s origin lies in ballet. It refers to that supernumerary character who is nameless, faceless, and seen as just another set piece, albeit a dancing one. The members of the corps de ballet, the lowest ranked and paid dancers in a ballet company, are typically cast as figurants in any number of ballets. Most nineteenth-century ballets are all structured in such a way that the main characters are danced by the principles, supporting roles by soloists, and the characters who, for all intents and purposes are pure aesthetic additions, are danced by the corps. In *Giselle*, for example, the ballet plays out amidst a background of hundreds of female corps dancers playing the “willis.” These ghost characters are dressed the same and they all perform the same choreography with no possibility of any spectator differentiating them as individual dancers. This type of figurant appears everywhere in the story-ballet genre: the swans in *Swan Lake*, the Shades in *La Bayadère*, and snowflakes in *The Nutcracker*. Corps de ballet dancers are the best illustrations of figurants to help imagine just exactly what they look like in their primary definition.

Now, to define them ontologically.

A figurant is an object. It is used as an accessory to the set of a dramatic artwork and also used as a way to support an overall narrative. Since a figurant specifically supports a larger project but is also still an acting subject who can exert force, the figurant-as-object can best be understood in Fred Moten’s terms of objecthood. Moten, in *In the Break*, says, “I want to show the interarticulation of the resistance of the object with Marx’s subjunctive figure of the commodity who speaks.” The figurant is the speaking commodity because she pragmatically and aesthetically supports the function of the system in which she operates. How she acts and what she does in this system affects her exchange-value in a market in which she is traded, bought, and sold. The figurant also works—with little compensation not commensurate with her level of experience or effort—to support entire performances by simply shedding all individuality, subjecting herself to the authority of a choreographer, and becoming part of a faceless, voiceless, multitudinous, dancing body.
Another way the figurant may manifest itself in works of art is as part of the frame of the work. Again, this iteration of the figurant is best illustrated in classical ballet. During a given solo variation or pas de deux, the principle dancers are often dancing under a spotlight and within a border of corps de ballet dancers. The corps members perform a frame by maintaining the same, immobile pose for the entire duration of the principles’ variation. Through their active labor, they produce an artistic frame, a *parergon*, to use Jacques Derrida’s terminology. The parergon is defined as “neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d’oeuvre*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below […] it gives rise to the work.” When Derrida says the frame “gives rise” to the work, he may be understood to mean that the frame is the paradigmatic apparatus that allows viewers to understand that what they are looking at is being defined by the frame, or the fact of the frame. That is to say, spectators understand the performance to be a classical ballet through the use of figurants all dressed the same, holding a pose on the edge of the stage, as opposed to a more modern or contemporary ballet or work of dance which typically does not use figurants or ensemble dancers in the same way. The figurant is the necessary, syntactical object that supports the work to make it art. She is conceptually supportive of the ballet specifically in that her presence places spectators into the context of classical ballet.

The figurant as parergon supports the work aesthetically. The corps dancers are extensions of the set and further add to the design of the performance by the principles. And, since they move as one massive body, when they change position or weave in and out of each other, they create a more dynamic scenery. This theatrical dynamism of choreography is often beautiful and pleasing to watch and characteristic of classical ballet scenes. Figurants are able to exercise a limited amount of artistry—limited by the fact that they are subjects of the ballet master, or choreographer—in order to create and be a beautiful framework in favor of the beauty of the principles and soloists.

Finally, the figurant can also be understood to be the ground, support, or underlying foundation of a work of art or situations in everyday life. In this understanding of a figurant, we may move to the context of art-life performances, or socially engaged artworks. Figurants that are present in works of art that engage everyday life are the characters that are never seen in the proverbial “spotlight.” These kind of figurants who are the performative foundation for everyday life are the people who do not play a central role in our own personal narrative thread. They do, however, provide a certain stability to our way of life. An example of a figurant of this kind would be the maintenance worker who labors to keep the spaces we occupy clean and free of refuse. We are conditioned to believe that the local garbage men who collect our waste are not key players in our lives, and yet what would our lives look like without them? Shannon Jackson engages this form of the figurant by looking at Mierle
Laderman Ukeles’s recontextualization of the sanitation worker and bringing him to the foreground. Seeing the figurant through this lens allows for a better understanding of how these people operate as foundational supports for our everyday lives. When Jackson says, “[s]uch wider apparatuses of labor and infrastructure support our self-figuration, but often it is only when there is a break in their service that we register their presence,” she brings to mind the most important characteristic of the figurant: near invisibility. This definition of figurant-as-support-for-self is perhaps the most important because it encompasses all other versions of the figurant, the aforementioned figurant-as-object, -laborer, -commodity, -frame.

Thus far, I have dealt with the notion of the figurant purely conceptually and theoretically. I will now offer three examples in art of what a figurant is and what a figurant can do when moving beyond their “peripheral status.” The first work, a dance, is Véronique Doisneau (2004). This piece, staged at the Paris National Opera, is a thirty-minute dance with a cast of one dancer, Véronique, who is a “sujet” of the Paris Opera ballet company, a corps de ballet dancer. She retired at the age of 42 having never been promoted beyond the corps. The performance consists of Véronique recounting her dance career as a figurant. Throughout a discussion of what dance means to her, Véronique reveals the experience of being a corps de ballet dancer: “[…] we become human décor to highlight the ‘Stars’ and for us it is the most horrible thing we do.” Here, Véronique explicitly describes her figurant experience as one where she feels like an object. When she discusses her desire to scream as she is holding a pose while the principles dance, she becomes Moten’s resistant object. Further, when she takes advantage of the space given to her and begins performing her favorite classical variation, she becomes the object, or commodity, that speaks (speaking in her own dance-language). As the self-described “human décor,” or set piece, Véronique is the figurant who is the parergon, the one who is the edge of the art, neither in nor out of it. She demonstrates that the parergon, although being with the art constantly, is isolated from the work. She is dancing in the ballet, but she is not always physically dancing. Bel articulates the concept behind this phenomenon: “This person is part of a structure which allows her to practise her art, but which also alienates her.” Véronique Doisneau is an exemplary performance that highlights the figurant-as-object and figurant-as-frame defintions.

Another, more generalized, example of figurant-as-frame is the movie extra. This type of figurant intrigues artist and choreographer Marie La Ribot as she explores the function and action of the extra in her ongoing project entitled FILM NOIR (2014). The cinematic extra is the person who is cast and paid to do nothing but be matter and occupy space in any given scene. The extra is not treated as though they are in the movie and they are certainly not paid as much as the actors with speaking roles, and yet, they are, in fact, in
the movie. FILM NOIR 001 aims to expose this bizarre aspect of the figurant by highlighting the extras in their own special films. In an excerpt from the first part of this work in progress, FILM NOIR 001 presents silent, compressed video footage from Sparticus (1960). The video is focused on one or two extras, which allows the viewer to contemplate the figurant’s role without the distraction of the plot and the storylines of the main characters. How we have been conditioned to think of what a film looks like is deconstructed when the figurant is no longer acting as a support. When the figurant becomes the centerpiece, the film is reconstructed into a new kind of cinema and the viewers are left with just the frame, and not the representation contained within it.

Finally, the figurant-as-support appears in Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Snow Workers’ Ballet (2003). As part of Ukeles’s sanitation art, this piece calls attention to those laborers who support our contemporary way of life by maintaining roads and sidewalks during the particularly snowy months of winter. Speaking of the piece, Ukeles said, “When I met the 13 snow workers, I said to them, ‘Everyone thinks you are heroes in the winter, right?’ And they said, ‘Right.’ ‘But in the summer, I’ll bet everyone forgets about you, right?’ And they smiled and shook their heads. ‘Right.’” Responding to the overlooked workers, Ukeles choreographed an eight-movement ballet where the snow workers operated their plows in a field during the summer months. In this exquisite body-without-organs maneuver, Ukeles deterritorializes the snow workers and their machines by putting them into a season they do not typically appear in and allowing them to dance and to be viewed beyond their seasonal function. Snow Workers’ Ballet uncovers the maintenance workers as the figurants who support the daily lives of people who live in places where snowfall occurs. We fully realize and understand what Jackson means when she says, “But the accessory object can also be a vital helpmate, one that advances and supports the goals of a larger action. In many ways, the concept of the [figurant] might be most resonant for a networked social world that does not always imagine itself in need of a base.” Being all-consuming by our own lives, stories, and main characters, we rarely notice the figurants who play, perhaps, one of the most important roles in our lives. The snow workers who provide us with the convenience to walk around in the environment without worrying about a four-foot snow trench or slippery ice on the sidewalk liberate us to continue to be self-absorbed. They are the figurants who provide the support necessary to live our lives the way we want to. In Ukeles’s ongoing project to blur the distinction between art and life, we are reminded that figurants, first conceived as the beautiful additions to classical ballets, are not only aesthetic objects and frames, but are also very real foundations in the everyday.

These figurants-as-support, as shown in Snow Workers’ Ballet, further exemplify the figurant-as-object, and –frame as well. Firstly, the sanitation and
maintenance workers can be examined as objects because they experience being conflated with the litter they dispose of. Additionally, if we think of our lives as a sort of aesthetic representation that could be contained in a frame, the snow worker figurants are performing the parergon exactly as Derrida explained in that they “give rise” to the artwork that is our lives. Through Ukeles’s recontextualization of the supernumerary characters of everyday life, our eyes are opened to all three versions of the figurant present in art and life.

By now, the figurant has been thoroughly defined and articulated as an object, support, and frame of the artwork. In *Snow Workers’ Ballet*, the maintenance workers are examples of the figurant-as-object because they are often thought of as the trash they remove. The film extras in *Film Noir 001* are supportive figurants in that they are dramaturgically supportive of the cinematic narrative. In *Véronique Doisneau*, as in all romantic story-ballets, the corps dancers are the frame of the ballet both by being on the edge of the stage, framing the principles, and by allowing the story to unfold in a pragmatic and aesthetically beautiful way. Now, I will explore how a figurant might act beyond the limitations thrust upon her. Specifically, I am answering my second research question: How is the artwork, and life, affected when the figurant moves into and dances in the spotlight? When a figurant takes agency, everything about the work and its surroundings is altered, but in a way that brings people out of their self-absorption. Becoming aware of the figurant increases our sense of community.

Fred Moten, in his discussion of the object/commodity-who-speaks, takes up this question while looking at the work of philosopher and performance artist, Adrian Piper. The object—the figurant—who is part of a work of art is a catalyst who causes a thought reaction in the viewer who experiences her. “For Piper, to be for the beholder is to be able to mess up or mess with the beholder. It is the potential of being catalytic. Beholding is *always* the entrance into a scene, into the context of the other, of the object.”17 When the figurant, who is, in this case for the beholder, does something to catalyze a reaction in the viewer, she allows for new perspectives to emerge. The figurant acting out demonstrates the existence of an other and thus opens the viewer up to difference. Véronique, for example, while performing as the star of *Véronique Doisneau* opens the audience up to the realities of what it is like to have a career that is never recognized and is always in the background. Where the audience sees merely a flock of swans in *Swan Lake*, here they see the individual. More importantly, they see an individual other than the principle dancer, star of the show. This is a central idea to the work: “what I’m interested in is how the individual relates to the social structure he belongs to and what the performer does to the choreographic structure.”18 In highlighting the figurant in ballet, the audience more deeply understands the relationships between central and periphery players, and they are therefore more
likely to widen their overall perspective on the fact of the other. *FILM NOIR 001* makes use of the same strategy. While watching a re-imagined *Sparticus*, with the main characters out of the shot and their dialogue silenced, the viewers are informed of another story that is happening concurrently. The movie extra, by himself on the screen, catalyzes spectators to think beyond the plot that is given. They can imagine this character's life story and think about the things he might say in the absence of the main characters' dialogues. The cinematic extras move around in silence and through their choreography, the audience finally understands that there is no single story to be followed. As the snow workers are pre-figured in people's minds as objects, *Snow Workers' Ballet*, in its recontextualized program, also exhibits how we, the viewers here, might be opened up to the difference in our everyday lives. Seeing a laborer operate his location- and season-specific machine in a place and time where and when it is not typically used is the exact catalysis Moten speaks of. Rather than simply exhibit snow workers clearing actual snow in the winter, Ukeles takes away the snow so that we can focus on the figurants.\(^\text{19}\) She does the work of the maintenance workers so that they can be free to do as they please and moving outside of their place in the margins. Opposite of the way of a non-catalytic, conventional work of art operates, *Snow Workers' Ballet* disrupts our self-absorption and compels us to look beyond ourselves.\(^\text{20}\) The figurant takes center stage and we are reminded that the story is not simply made up of central characters.

When a figurant is able to break the frame he constructs, he is not breaking himself as would be assumed in the case of defining the figurant-as-frame. Rather, he rids the work of its container, allows the art to become a little less hygienic, and propels the viewer outside of a pure aesthetic and into gritty reality. Speaking of frame-breaking, Suely Rolnik writes, “[Lygia Clark] dissolve[s] the neutral zone representing the frame, which, in separating the canvas from the exterior world, buffers the disruptive power of art […] Clark succeeded in summoning this power, liberating the plane of transcendence and returning it to immanence.”\(^\text{21}\)

When Véronique steps onto the stage, in her warm up clothes, no makeup, not looking like a figurant, as she normally does, she is affecting this “neutral zone” that she typically creates and occupies. *Véronique Doisneau*, through the strategy of breaking the frame, does not appear to be a refined work of art. The piece loses some sort of purity and aesthetic beauty classically associated with art. It brings the audience closer to reality and away from representation.\(^\text{22}\) In this simultaneous distancing from beauty and propulsion toward actuality, we find the other rather than ourselves and our individual interpretation of the art. When *FILM NOIR 001* displaces viewers from the plot of the movie to the non-character of the extra, they are placed in another aspect of experiencing something closer to reality. The art of the film does not dictate
a story to them with a prescribed beginning, middle, and end. Rather, they have the opportunity to participate with the writers and filmmakers in imagining the stories of these figurants. This is the plane of immanence achievable through the breaking of the frame. Much the same way as Véronique Doisneau and FILM NOIR 001, Snow Workers’ Ballet breaks the frame in order to guide us to see beyond the images of a convenient life and into the lives of those who support our lifestyles. Again, it clears a path to immanence which, in the blurring between art and life, puts us side by side those figurants who are neither entirely inside nor outside our everyday lives.

When the figurant, who acts as the foundational support of the artwork, moves beyond her traditional role, we become aware of our ability to support ourselves. When Véronique stops being the figurant in support of the principle dancers and performs the variations that personally mean the most to her, she reveals the ways in which she is supportive. Véronique tells the audience her favorite choreography to perform and when she steps back to actually dance it, she has no costume except for a rehearsal tutu, no special lighting, and she makes her own music by humming the tune as she dances. In every theatrical way, she is her own support. When she breaks out of her figurant role, instead of the support falling away entirely, she is able to support herself. It is true that her solo variation does not have the same aesthetic quality as would a principle’s, what with no sets, costumes, lighting, and figurants to add to it, but it does create an entirely new work of art. Born out of this new artwork is a politically charged awareness of individuals working within larger systems. Rather than blindly appreciating only the finished product, the audience learns through this new version of the same work to value the effort and labor that goes into artistry and creation. While watching a film, viewers are comfortable when they see a scene taking place on a busy city street and there are people all around—even if that comfort goes unnoticed, it is still present. If the cinematic figurants were absent, the audience might feel uneasy. The tense affects of a post-apocalyptic dystopia might fill up the space usually claimed by extras. They are the ones who ground the film scene in fictional reality. FILM NOIR 001 is not displacing the extra in order to remove the narrative support of the film, but rather it highlights the figurants in their supportive role. The focus on their individuality and labor of building systems of support again changes the outcome of the artwork and how it is viewed. Viewers understand the film with regard to how the luxury and/or pleasure it provides them with was created by a team of directors, actors, and figurants. In the final, most explicit act of blurring the distinction between art and life, releasing the maintenance workers from their figurant bondage forces viewers to consider their labor and support of daily life. The strategic disappearance of the support of the snow workers does not result in chaos, but rather results in seeing the world in which we live through a new lens.
Understanding more about who makes the art more beautiful—more realistic in its representation—and the narrative more coherent does not negatively affect the work, but changes our perspective on it. We are left thinking more deeply about the piece, understanding the creative force and process behind the work of art; ultimately, we have an intimate proximity to the artwork. Similarly, using artistic strategies to consider the figurants in our daily lives does not negatively affect our daily lives, but rather links us to the world beyond ourselves more profoundly. It refreshes our perspective such that we recognize the other and remember that we are not alone in the world.

NOTES

2 Ibid., 834.
7 This piece initiated a series of works that all explore the recurring theme of the individual dancer who tells his/her personal dance career history which intersects with the larger history of dance. These later reprisals/reperformances/revisions, all choreographed by Jérôme Bel, of *Véronique Doisneau* are: Isabel Torres (Rio de Janeiro, 2005); Pichet Klunchun and myself (Bangkok, 2005); Lutz Förster (Wuppertal, 2009); and Cédric Andrieux (Paris, 2009).
9 In an interview on *Véronique Doisneau*, Bel talks about how the piece also explores the language of dance: “What attracts me in dance is its 'language.' […] Dance in itself doesn't interest me as much as all that. What I find interesting is what it manages to say. I don't want to redefine […] classical dance; I just want to lay it bare, to present it, by showing its rules and especially, the effects of its rules.” Jérôme Bel, “Véronique Doisneau—Paris National Opera 09. 2004,” *RB Jérôme Bel* (2009), URL: http://www.jeromebel.fr/textsandinterviews/detail/?textInter=veronique%20doisneau%20-%20paris%20national%20opera.
10 Ibid.
11 *FILM NOIR* is the name of the ongoing art project with each iteration serially titled *FILM NOIR 001*, *FILM NOIR 002*, and *FILM NOIR 003*. 001 is the only part of the project this essay will engage with.
12 The original 2003 performance took place at the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale, and was re-performed in 2012 at the same festival.
13 Ukeles's sanitation art fills an entire archive with pieces that engage with sanitation and how it operates in the background of our lives. For a more thorough survey of this work, see: Shannon Jackson, “High Maintenance: The Sanitation Aesthetics of Mierle Laderman Ukeles,” *Social Works*.
15 See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “November 28, 1947: how do you make yourself a

16 Jackson, “High Maintenance,” Social Works, 80. Here, I substitute figurant for Jackson’s term “prop” for the same reason that was mentioned in the introduction of this essay.


19 For a more in-depth discussion of this aspect of Ukeles’s methodology, see: Jackson, “High Maintenance,” Social Works.

20 The conventional operation, being allowing the viewer a certain self-absorption to be found in the work. See also: Moten’s discussion on “the Friedien beholder” in “Resistance of the Object,” In the Break.

21 Suely Rolnik, “Molding a Contemporary Soul: The Empty-full of Lygia Clark,” The Experimental Exercise of Freedom (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), 72. I make a brief nod to Lygia Clark here because she deeply understood the profound effects of breaking the frame. Acknowledging her experimentations with the frame gives context to the artistic processes of breaking it. This, in turn, helps to understand what the figurant is doing when he breaks the frame.

Our apartment was in Manhattan
though we slept in the same room
my little brother lived in the Bronx
because of the subway

Stations that serve
the red one two three trains we rode
have signs that say
in white sans-serif on matte-black aluminum
“Uptown and the Bronx”

For my five-year-old brother
it wasn’t until we went to the Children’s Museum of Manhattan
on foot
that he knew where he lived

For a fare, the subway brings us where we need to go
But we pay by losing
the space through which we traveled
“We could meet up and go with Mikey to Rosanne’s?”
“Not today. Let’s do something exciting. I don’t want ice cream.”
“Who doesn’t like ice cream?”
“I like it fine. Don’t want it.”
“I want some. Lemme swing in quick. It’ll be quick I promise.”
“Alright. Just be quick.”

The boy tied his shoelaces. The girl dawdled in the bell-strung doorway.
Two circles of pink and blue sat atop each waffle cone.
“Tie yours too” he said, looking down at her feet.
“You know I don’t like cotton candy Marnie.”

It was a windy spring. A cool sunny Sunday. No one has had a good hair day since February. The town throbbed for summer. Little globs of snow riddled the green, puddled lawns.
“We could throw stones into the Gorge?”
“The Gorge down Pickle Street?”
“Pichel Street Marnie.”
“I know. Ms. Rupen told me a few weeks ago. Been messin’ that up my whole life.”

She laughed. They wiped their mouths with the backs of their sticky hands. More would be lost in the Gorge than stones.
I weave the thread onto the upright loom.  
A patient wife, I wait for the still night,  
then squint my eyes, undo my job in gloom.

It's tough to have to keep this placid look.  
I crave your touch—your calloused hands—yet fight  
and weave the thread onto the upright loom.

For nineteen years I've labored in this room.  
Pinched my thumbs, my pallid palms. Still, at dark  
I squint my eyes, undo my job in gloom.

It well may be you're rotting in your tomb,  
or crushed at last, your eyes robbed of their light.  
I weave the thread onto the upright loom.

Why should I spin this wool while daisies bloom  
outside the house? This is a senseless rite.  
I squint my eyes, undo my job in gloom.

I'm furious. My eyes are full of rheum.  
This homely odyssey is also mine.  
I weave the thread onto the upright loom.  
I squint my eyes, undo my job in gloom.
250 copies of *Anamesa* were printed by Sterling Pierce Co., Inc. East Rockaway, New York www.sterlingpierce.com

The text of *Anamesa* is set in Minion, an Adobe Original typeface designed in 1990 by Robert Slimbach. Inspired by classical serif fonts of the late Renaissance, Slimbach's design is highly adaptable to digital media. The "typographer's bible," Robert Bringhurst's *Elements of Typographic Style* is set in Minion, and the typeface is beloved for its combination of practicality and elegance.

*Anamesa*’s titles use Adobe Caslon, the same typeface as the body text of *The New Yorker*. Designed in 1990 by Carol Twombly, Adobe Caslon is based on a mid-18th century specimen page of the Dutch Baroque typeface designed by William Caslon I but adapted for modern and digital use. Caslon was a favorite in 18th century British and American printing, and was even used to print the American Declaration of Independence. As the old typographer’s saying goes, “When in doubt, use Caslon.”

The letter A in *Anamesa*’s logo uses Play Ball, a font designed in 2011 by calligrapher and designer Rob Leuschke. Leushke designed Play Ball as an “athletic” font, recalling baseball jerseys and team logos, and the uppercase A features a distinct curving swash.

The remainder of the *Anamesa* logo is set in Crimson Text, a typeface designed by Sebastian Kosch in 2011. A serif typeface in the Garamond tradition, Crimson Text is intended for book design and inspired by the work of the giants of modern type design: Jan Tischhold, Robert Slimbach and Jonathan Hoefler. Kosch hopes it will become a “beautiful workhorse,” an alternative to the standard Times.