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# SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES

VOLUME 39 : 4 : 2020

# MUSIC PERFORMANCE AND protest

## Cover 39/4, Design: Debra Livingston

I wanted something bold and contemporary for this special music topic for Social Alternatives, issue 39-4 cover design as we travel out of the COVID-19 restrictions and gain our sense of freedom. One of those freedoms is being able to once again attend recitals or concerts or live music as live performances both in music and theatre are struggling under the continuing restrictions on crowd capacity for entertainment venues.

The topic of this issue is the various ways music and performance have been an important part of protest and resistance. It covers a wide variety of music genres plus a paper on resisting the Garu the training of actors. Songs of protest have featured in many genres of music throughout history, across generations and cultures involved in movements for social change. Such songs share an emotional response to social injustice by protesting the status quo and creatively calling for reform. Although, protest is not pictorially shown within the cover design, the negative psychology of red is associated with fire, violence anger and danger, and prone to instigate action, hence the colour red for the title of this issue. The cover design was inspired by Catherine Strong's paper in which she discusses the 'Disco Disruption' as protest citing the protest in Melbourne Australia where climate activists staged a disco-themed dance protest to call for action on climate change. Authorities have called this protest 'civil disco-disobedience' that has now become a call to join the rebellion. The 'Extinction Rebellion' choreographed disco-disruption is where people are protesting peacefully by dancing in the streets to the tune of the Bee Gees song 'Stayin' Alive'. An apt song for climate change action. The 'Saturday Night Fever' civil DISCObedience is gaining popularity in all states of Australia and is a part of 'Extinction Rebellion Australia's Digital Rebellion'.

### References: [cited 25/07/2021]

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=552474815732225&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=552474815732225&ref=watch_permalink)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGMKumKBZJI>

[https://ausrebellion.earth/?fbclid=IwAR3v-Rlj5C5gtjIqP7\\_Zr0YBk-B3jWRFcGEuEswDPPQWL2uQ5FkOH09PK8](https://ausrebellion.earth/?fbclid=IwAR3v-Rlj5C5gtjIqP7_Zr0YBk-B3jWRFcGEuEswDPPQWL2uQ5FkOH09PK8)

<https://xrsa.com.au/event/saturday-night-fever-civil-discobedience/>



## The 2021 BR4R Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize is now open

*Ballina Region for Refugees invites you to submit up to three poems to this year's Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize. This year's theme is 'Time for a Home'.*

The BR4R Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize celebrates the positive contributions that refugees make to our communities. It acknowledges the circumstances that forced them to flee their homelands and request refuge in Australia.

**We welcome poems of up to 50 lines that consider the experiences, aspirations and hopes of refugees and asylums seeking a home in which to build new, meaningful and safe lives.**

The 2021 BBR4R Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize takes inspiration from the #TIMEFORAHOME campaign. It is time in Australia to release all refugees from detention. **It is time for a permanent resettlement solution. It is time to give our refugees a home.**

Poets may send in up to three poems. Poems can be sent until the closing date of Sunday 15th August 2021. Entry is free and is open to anyone living in Australia. BR4R especially welcomes poems from refugees and those seeking asylum in Australia.

Cash prizes will be awarded to first (\$300), second (\$150), and third (\$50) place winners. Winning entries and selected runners-up will be published in Social Alternatives.

Further information, guidelines & conditions, and entry form are available at <https://br4r.org.au/poetry-comp/>.

*Ballina Region for Refugees is a volunteer organisation supporting refugees and asylum seekers.*

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### Social Alternatives

*Social Alternatives* is an independent, quarterly refereed journal which aims to promote public debate, commentary and dialogue about contemporary social, political, economic and environmental issues.

*Social Alternatives* analyses, critiques and reviews contemporary social issues and problems. The journal seeks to generate insight, knowledge and understanding of our contemporary circumstances in order to determine local, national and global implications. We are committed to the principles of social justice and to creating spaces of dialogue intended to stimulate social alternatives to current conditions. *Social Alternatives* values the capacity of intellectual and artistic endeavour to prompt imaginative solutions and alternatives and publishes refereed articles, review essays, commentaries and book reviews as well as short stories, poems, images and cartoons.

The journal has grappled with matters of contemporary concern for four decades, publishing articles and themed issues on topics such as peace and conflict, racism, Indigenous rights, social justice, human rights, inequality and the environment. Please show your support by subscribing to the journal. For other enquiries please contact a member of the Editorial Collective.

### The Editorial Collective

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Submissions of articles, commentaries, reviews and fictional works are subject to double blind peer review and should be emailed to the general article editor. Authors are encouraged to consider and reference papers previously published in *Social Alternatives* to promote ongoing discussion. Submissions should be double-spaced with page numbers on the bottom right. Academic articles should be approximately 3,000-5,000 words, commentaries and review essays between 800 to 1,500 words, book reviews 800 words, short stories 1,000 words and poetry up to 25 lines. Submissions must include:

- copyright release form
- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

Please use Australian/English spelling and follow Harvard referencing. Submit tables, graphs, pictures and diagrams on separate pages. Remove in-text references identifying authors and replace with [name removed for the review process].

For further information please consult our website:  
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# Music, Performance and Protest

ANDY WARD

The Anthropocene is noisy, sonic and full of music. The emergence of listening as method has been brought to the forefront of the arts/science/creativity nexus. Less invasive, and rich in outcomes than other methods, this approach highlights that our need to listen to our planet and each other has never been more urgent. In the pre-COVID cacophony of the seemingly dying embers of late-stage capitalism, the world was flooded with divisive rhetoric pushing our world further into the isolating social silence of the market of one. In 2020, the proliferation of a Global pandemic seemed to change the music of the planet and its people. In the year that was, with one ear we could hear the calls for meaningful change in the Black Lives Matter Movement and Extinction rebellion, and with the other ear the endless dull roar of neo-feudal corporatism brought about the storming of a capital, the raucous argument for economy over humanity, and the continued cries as the environment was being sacrificed at the altar of the almighty dollar. And yet, for one short minute, the earth stood still. We could hear the seas again. Our ceasing of an endless need for consumption and travel heard the return of moments of meaningful stillness.

Here we find ourselves, now emerging from the discombobulation caused by a moment in human and earthly history. As scholars, through this rapid and sudden change we find ourselves in a data and information-rich research ecology. As pedagogues, the structures and modes of meaningful communication have been augmented, and very often for the aim of false austerity in the academy as it teeters on the edge of corporatism, fighting for its last benevolent social breath.

Gathered in this short special edition of six articles, are pages dedicated to the diversity of our social roles as scholars. Some contributions explore the intersection of music and activism for environmental gain, others unpack the economies of availability that inform our new online workshop spaces. All seek to address a key notion of the recent turmoil, and achieve this with heart-warmingly positive insight into popular culture and the diverse critical discourse of the modern music fan/artist ecosystem.

Music, like all human communication, is a social act. It is deeply embedded with its environment and acts far more in rhetoric, activism, and human change than the

soundbite it is very often reduced to. It is hard to remember, while walking the aisles of a neo-feudal corporate prison of dystopia like a supermarket, that music is making you move at a certain pace so you can carefully absorb branding communication on its shelves. Indeed, the ubiquitous nature of popular song can very much find its origin in the Military Entertainment Complex, but I digress. Music, like any great thing, is often used for nefarious purpose... but with careful socially informed and active listening, change can happen. The music we make, embrace and explore can be crafted into the weapons that free those of us who are among the oppressed in the frightening violent systems of consumption and oppression.

As the guest editor, I hope this edition serves to encourage us all to listen more to our planet, to its people, to its music, both anthropogenic and environmental.

## Author

Dr Andy Ward is a researcher focusing on songwriting, music theory, sustainability, and popular culture. Andy brings his years of industry practice to academia previously working as a songwriter, producer and performing artist. Today he continues to work with major record labels and music publishers on developing songs and artists from around the world. His research is focused on decolonising music hierarchies, narratology-based music inquiry, performance technology, music industry research, regional and remote music, sustainability in creative economies, and further establishing songwriting-as-research methodologies.

### Black Smokers<sup>1</sup>

For cities of bacteria that need not light nor air ...

In deepest darkness they began:  
before breath and green trees  
running deer and leopards.  
Before poetry, before death.

MARGARET DINGLE

1. Black smokers are hydrothermal vents in the deep ocean which nourish bacteria that do not need light or oxygen. They may be among the earliest forms of life.

## POETRY AUTHORS

**Margaret Dingle** is part author of *Friendly Street* New Poets 12 and has been published in a number of poetry anthologies. Her poems, *Afterwards* and *Fireworks* won equal first prize in the 2003 International Women's Day (SA) poetry competition 2003. Her poetry collection *The Landscape of Dreams*, was published in 2014. She has been active in advocating for public transport and renewable energy.

**Steve Brock's** books include *Double Glaze* (Five Islands Press, 2013) and *Live at Mr Jake's* (Wakefield Press, 2020). He is the co-translator with Juan Garrido-Salgado and Sergio Holas of *Poetry of the Earth: Mapuche Trilingual Anthology* (Interactive Press 2014).

**Ella O'Keefe** is a poet and researcher who lives in Melbourne on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Her debut collection *Slowlier* was published by Cordite Books in January 2021 and poems in this issue are reprinted with permission from this book. Other publications include *Rhinestone* (2015, Stale Objects dePress) and *It's what we're already doing*, in collaboration with Elena Gomez, Leah Muddle, Melody Paloma, Emily Stewart and Sian Vate (2018, Shower Books).

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**Cath Kenneally** is a poet, novelist and arts journalist who lives in Adelaide. She won the John Bray National Poetry Award with her first book, *Around Here*; her latest (2021) is *The Southern Oscillation Index* (Wakefield Press).

Melbourne-born and based poet, **Peter Bakowski** wrote his poems for *NEARLY LUNCH* spontaneously in a back and forth ping pong rally way with and "against" Ken Bolton, deriving challenge and enjoyment from the experience.

**Ken Bolton** is a Sydney poet who moved to Adelaide for the easy life. He has published much poetry and

art criticism. The co-authored *Nearly Lunch* will be his second book with Peter Bakowski.

**Grant Caldwell** is a poet, novelist and academic. His latest books are *the edge of the forest* – Cyberwit (India), 2021; *blue balloon: a collection of haiku and senryu* – Collective Effort Press 2020; *Intention and Unintention or the Hyperconscious in Contemporary Lyric Impulse* – Arcadia: Australian Scholarly Publishing 2018. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Melbourne.

### Personality test

a colleague  
shows me the results  
of his psychometric testing

it cost the company  
a couple of grand

he had to work  
in groups  
through different  
scenarios

the test went for the full day  
& they had different individuals  
observing each exercise  
to avoid prejudice

the report was detailed  
with complex graphs  
mapping his leadership qualities  
his emotional resilience  
his problem-solving abilities  
his communication skills

the fact he liked to be in control  
of situations  
& was good  
at small talk

it took some time to read  
& I kept looking  
but still couldn't find it

apparently they failed to pick up  
he's a dickhead.

STEVE BROCK

# Civil Discobedience: ‘Bad environmentalism’, queer time and the role of popular music’s past in Extinction Rebellion

CATHERINE STRONG

*On 9 and 11 October 2019 members of Extinction Rebellion (XR) took to the streets of Melbourne for the first iterations of the ‘Disco Disruption’ – a climate protest that involved progressively occupying various intersections throughout the CBD and performing a choreographed dance to the Bee Gees’ song ‘Stayin’ Alive’. The event caught the imagination of XR protesters worldwide, with a video of the action being watched over one million times on Twitter. On 6 December that year a ‘Global Discobedience’ event was held where the protest was reproduced in over 20 countries on the same day. This paper will present an exploratory examination of why the Discobedience has struck such a chord and become so popular within the movement, using the event as a lens through which to explore the possibilities offered by the mode of protesting it represents. It will use the concept of ‘bad environmentalism’, as developed by Nicole Seymour, to frame the action as one that offers a potential destabilisation and queering of time and makes thinking differently about the future possible in new ways. It will argue that the musical choice of ‘Stayin’ Alive’, and the cultural memories it evokes, are central to this possibility.*

KEY WORDS: Extinction rebellion, popular music, civil disobedience, disco, flash-mob, environmentalism, environmental activism.

One cannot speak of a democratic state without linking it to a democratic community. The democratic state involves a set of institutions designed to allow for the expression of the ‘will’, or wills, of the people, while at the same time providing the widest possible latitude for persons to conduct their own lives as they see fit. The ancient Greeks understood this, and allowed for personal experimentation and even eccentricity. They did not impose sanctions on people being themselves, unless of course they were interfering with the liberties of others, or engaging in criminal activity.

During the week of October 7, 2019, Extinction Rebellion (XR) Victoria held the ‘Spring Rebellion’, a week of protests in the CBD of Melbourne, Australia. In line with the overall philosophy of XR, this involved a series of actions using non-violent civil disobedience as a way of disrupting ‘business as usual’ and calling attention to the need to act on the climate and ecological emergency (see Extinction Rebellion 2019a or the Australian Extinction Rebellion website at [ausrebellion.earth](http://ausrebellion.earth) for further information on the goals and tactics of XR). Although the numbers of participants in XR Victoria were not high enough to stage the same type of intensive actions that XR UK undertook in London earlier that year, which saw the city centre almost brought to a stand-still as

bridges were occupied for days on end (Booth 2019), a series of marches, road blockades, and swarms caused considerable disruption and led to over one hundred arrests. There was also extensive media coverage of the events, which served to raise the profile of XR in Australia and draw attention to government inaction on the climate emergency.

On the Wednesday and Friday of that week, an action was held that stood somewhat apart from the other events. The ‘Disco Disruption’, or ‘Civil Discobedience’, involved rebels (including myself) learning choreography to the Bee Gees’ song ‘Stayin’ Alive’ in Carlton Gardens, where the base camp for the Spring Rebellion was located, before moving through the city and progressively occupying key intersections to perform the dance. Participants came dressed in what could broadly be described as party fancy dress, sometimes with an obvious disco theme, but otherwise involving sparkles, wigs, and clothes that had an overall ‘retro’ feel. Adding to the colourful effect of these outfits were the XR flags, banners and signs, as well as a ‘disco bike’ with its own mirror ball that transported the solar-powered sound system that played ‘Stayin’ Alive’ for the staged dances, and a variety of disco hits that activists danced freestyle to as they travelled from one intersection to the next. A short video overview of the first

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of the two events can be found on YouTube (Extinction Rebellion 2019b) and I strongly encourage readers to view this before proceeding with this paper.<sup>1</sup> Unlike some of the other events of the Spring Rebellion, this was promoted as a family-friendly, low risk event, and a police escort ensured intersections were secured as the dancers moved into them.

The format used for the Discobedience quickly captured the imagination of XR groups elsewhere. A tweet containing a short video of the dancing posted by Extinction Rebellion Australia (2019) quickly reached one million views, and on December 6 and 7 a 'Global Discobedience' was held to align with the 25th Conference of the Parties climate conference in Madrid (Extinction Rebellion Vic 2019). The format is now regularly being used by a variety of XR groups around the world, including isolation versions during COVID lockdowns that involved doing the dance over Zoom, or video montages of rebels doing the dance on their own (see Extinction Rebellion Italia 2020 for an example of this).

In this paper, I would like to do an exploratory examination of why the Discobedience has struck such a chord and become so popular within the movement. I don't wish to present this as a definitive analysis of what the event did, or what an event like this could do. I take note of the point that 'an ongoing challenge within the literature on music and activism ... is to connect formal, sonic, affective and subjective aspects of musical experience to observable political processes' (Green and Street 2018: 172). I would, however, like to use the protest as a lens through which to explore the possibilities offered by the mode of protesting it represents. The success of the event in terms of effect or community building within XR was immediately apparent, and there is a very obvious analysis that could be made in terms of the role an event like this plays in connecting people with one another and enhancing a sense of community among those already engaged in activism through the shared experience of 'musicking' (Small 1998). Similarly, the Discobedience could be analysed in terms of how it connects to the culture or 'movement music scene' (Futrell et al. 2006) of Extinction Rebellion, or in relation to the concept of the 'flash mob' and how it used urban space (Molnár 2013). However, I would like to try to run a different argument for this event as 'bad environmentalism' that offers a potential destabilisation and queering of *time* that makes thinking differently about the future possible in new ways. I will argue that the musical choice of 'Stayin' Alive', and the cultural memories it evokes, are central to this possibility.

### **Bad Environmentalism**

I would like to begin by interrogating this event using the concept of 'bad environmentalism', as developed by

Nicole Seymour (2018). Seymour notes that one of the main problems that environmental activists encounter is that the accepted modes of communication about issues like the climate crisis, and the effects produced by these issues, can actively discourage closer engagement with the cause. In cataloguing the 'affects and sensibilities typically associated with environmentalism', Seymour (2018: 4-5) notes that:

In addition to gloom and doom, these include guilt, shame, didacticism, prescriptiveness, sentimentality, reverence, seriousness, sincerity, earnestness, sanctimony, self-righteousness, and wonder – as well as the heteronormativity and whiteness of the movement.

Not only are these sensibilities off-putting, but they leave little room to effectively deal with the ironies and contradictions of the situation whether it be the role of science as both villain and potential saviour, the twists in discourse that have seen key tactics of the left such as scepticism deployed in service of climate change denial narratives, the failure of anthropogenic climate change narratives to fit with Indigenous realities in a whole variety of ways, or the fact that the only tools to fight for the planet that are available to us are themselves profoundly rooted in the cause of the problem (as is often triumphantly pointed out by critics of activists). As an alternative to this, Seymour (2018: 8) suggests a turn to:

'bad environmentalism': environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities to reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse.

As such, 'bad environmentalism' often involves "'low environmental culture": art and discourse that is accessible, non-hierarchical, and lowbrow' (114). This opens up ways to destabilise the meanings that underpin many of the accepted ways of talking about environmental issues, particularly in terms of the binary logics and hierarchies inherited from mainstream scientific discourses. Ecofeminist approaches suggest that 'climate change and first world overconsumption are produced by masculinist ideology, and will not be solved by masculinist techno-science approaches', suggesting that 'climate justice perspectives at the local, national, and global levels are needed to intervene and transform both our analyses and our solutions to climate change' (Gaard 2015: 20-21). In addition to offering ways of doing this, 'bad environmentalism' questions the necessity of utility in environmental cultural, whereby only activities or cultural items that are demonstrably effective in achieving a worthy environmental end – or that at least have a clear idea of what such an end might be – are seen as worthwhile.

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Seymour's approach to understanding bad environmentalism incorporates queer theory – using queerness 'as a stance rather than an identity' (24) – as one of its major theoretical viewpoints, because of the overlaps between the key qualities of bad environmentalism and the concerns of queer theorists. These include 'irony, irreverence, perversity, and playfulness but also absurdity, camp, frivolity, indecorum, ambivalence, and glee' (Seymour 2018: 23). This lens leads her to her key question, which I am also using to guide this interrogation of the Discobedience:

How might reclaiming gaiety and other contrarian modes enable us to create new modes of resistance, new forms of community, and new opportunities for inquiry into environmental crisis? (Seymour 2018: 24).

Using the responses to the tweet put out by XR Vic on the Civil Discobedience event mentioned above, we can easily conclude that this event is exactly the sort of 'bad environmentalism' that Seymour is discussing. The replies to the tweet fall broadly into three categories (in addition to the predictable 'why don't they get a job' or 'hey how did they get to the protest was it by car omg what hypocrites' comments that inevitably accompany any social media post or news story about climate activism). The first is supportive, offering praise for the event, generally along the lines of how much fun it looks, and how creative and colourful it is. The second is related, in that it uses the same elements of the protest – the frivolity and fun – as a means to attack the event, with suggestions that it is not taking its aims or subject matter seriously, or clearly moving towards a stated goal. The third theme is of embarrassment on behalf of the participants, with suggestions the event is 'cringeworthy'. The event lacks gravitas; the message, such as it is, is not clearly conveyed through the event itself but can only be accessed through engaging with Extinction Rebellion more broadly. Many of the people watching – at least during the Melbourne events – may not have even picked up on the climate messaging. The event also undeniably exhibited 'gaiety'. Did, then, this event offer space for the development of 'new modes of resistance' or 'opportunities for inquiry', and if so, what role might this particular song have played in this?

### **Music and Environmental Activism**

Music, of course, has often been central to activism and activist repertoires, including in the environmental movement. At a basic level, music can be used as a way of directly communicating about issues through lyrics (Denisoff 1972). However, the importance of music to processes of social change is generally seen as being more related to its affective dimensions, than its use as an educational tool. Kaltmeier and Raussert (2019: 6) argue that:

Music frequently takes on a seismographic function and narrates to a larger public the presence of social crisis through the act of performance. Since music appeals to all human senses, it carries the potential to push affective politics and sensitize its audience to social conflict, crisis, and injustice. It is the mix of affective, cognitive, and kinesthetic response to music that makes the latter a powerful medium to express, narrate, and reflect the social.

Nevertheless, despite a recent flurry of mainstream artists incorporating themes of climate crisis into their music, 'unlike peace, civil rights, and labor anthems, few environmentalist tunes have worked their way as deeply into activist practice or the popular imagination' (Pedelty 2016: 2; see also Rickwood 2017). A number of reasons have been suggested for this. As a starting point, Pedelty (2016) notes that the environmental movement is simply not as old as these other traditions. There may not yet have been time yet for environmental music to become part of what Eyerman and Jamison have termed the 'mobilization of tradition', where 'after the movements fade away as political forces, the music remains as a memory and as a potential way to inspire new waves of mobilisation' (Eyerman and Jamison 1998: 2).

For other writers, though, musical form and genre may be key to understanding the lack of iconic environmentalist songs. Similar to Seymour's points about the over-seriousness of environmental activists being a potential liability in their quest to convert others to their cause, Publicover (quoted in Rickwood 2017: 124) has noted that 'environmental topics are not well-served by music that is preachy, propagandizing, or simply utilitarian'. Pedelty goes further than this in suggesting it is not just that the right song hasn't been written, but that there is a fundamental mis-match between forms of music that are likely to have widespread appeal (particularly those broadly categorised as 'popular music') and an environmental message. Pointing to one of the key categories by which popular music's worthiness has often been judged, authenticity, he notes that:

the truth of art has always been partly contingent on its wider social resonance. How we make music in relation to context – environment – has always influenced interpretation. Music is sometimes perceived as less artful when message and means contradict each other ... Therefore, when art evokes a sustainable aesthetic, visual and material contradictions are inevitably brought into the listeners' interpretive assessments (Pedelty 2016: 18).

In other words, the fundamentally unsustainable, if not downright hedonistic, nature of the mass mediated music

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industries (Devine 2019) may render them unsuitable for conveying messages about the type of change that is currently needed in a meaningful way. Popular music, Pedelty argues, is essentially the theme music of consumer capitalism, designed to be disposable and unsustainable (in a number of ways).

It is exactly this appeal to authenticity and sincerity that using a song like 'Stayin' Alive' sidesteps. In order to understand this, we need to consider some of the associations of the song and the genre it belongs to, and how these contribute to the potential of this action. 'Staying Alive,' by Australian vocal trio The Bee Gees, is one of the most recognisable disco songs, but its place within that genre is contradictory in a number of ways. Disco emerged from dance clubs that were run by and catered for gay, black and Latinx patrons in 1970s New York. Key dance music scholar Tim Lawrence (2006: 150) notes that in addition to providing space for gay men and Persons of Colour (POC) to participate, women were also foregrounded in disco culture, particularly as vocal 'divas'. However, although emerging from these underground subcultures, by the mid-1970s the commercial potential of disco had been recognised, with corporate record labels' interest in the genre culminating in the release of the movie *Saturday Night Fever* in 1978. The movie and its soundtrack, which featured 'Stayin' Alive', were huge hits. For Lawrence (2006: 101), the depiction of disco culture in the movie was a sanitised version that omitted key aspects of gender and sexual identity that were core to the genre:

*Saturday Night Fever* reflected and reinforced the reappropriation of the dance floor by patriarchal heterosexuality, whereby dancers ... could only take the floor as part of a straight couple in which the man led the woman ... disco was suburbanized according to this regressive template.

For other scholars, however, the story is slightly more complicated, with the Bee Gees and Travolta as 'white men occupying vocal registers and striking choreographic poses that usurp the disco diva and the gay man while at the same time infringing upon, even denaturing, the very white masculinity that such a colonizing move is supposed to secure' (Nyong'o 2008: 165). That *Saturday Night Fever* and its soundtrack failed to completely recuperate disco from its outsider image can be seen in the notorious 'disco demolition' event that took place a year after their release. In July 1979, a disc jockey in Chicago called for baseball fans to bring disco albums to a game, where they were dramatically exploded in an event generally discussed as reflecting the racism and homophobia directed towards disco artists and audiences (Frank 2007). The DJ in question, however, has argued that it was the commercial

and frivolous nature of disco (that he contrasted to rock) that he objected to, thereby aligning his critique in some ways with the objections of the subcultural participants in early disco to *Saturday Night Fever* and associated culture as co-opted and inauthentic.

'Stayin' Alive' is, then, a somewhat messy cultural object that, while undoubtedly judged as lowbrow, fails to fit neatly into binary categories such as gay/straight, masculine/feminine, or commercial/organic, leaving it open to a variety of interpretations and affordances. This is furthered by the way the song has ultimately embedded itself in cultural memory in ways that make it particularly available to be used in an action like the Discobedience. Cultural memory involves 'the processes of the constitution and representation of the past in the present through the use of cultural items' (Strong 2015: 423). These items become imbued with symbolic meanings that are shared between people in a way that gives the items significance in the present. These meanings can vary between groups and can change over time, becoming multi-layered, but for the most well-known cultural items there will be certain ways in which they are understood that are fixed, or change only very slowly. As such an item, the use of 'Stayin' Alive' will always involve the invoking of shared conceptions of the past. Not only representative of disco, it can also be used as a shorthand call-out to the idea of the decade of 'the 70s', or even more broadly that which is 'retro', meaning the jumble of costumes at the Discobedience that shared nothing more than a sense of 'pop culture pastness' still made sense. More specifically, beyond music, it evokes a specific set of images – John Travolta's iconic dancefloor moves from the movie (despite the fact that the most recognisable sequence was set to a different song) as well as his rhythmic strut to 'Stayin' Alive' at the beginning of the movie. In this way we introduce yet another element of problematic or lowbrow culture, which is to do with dance. The mind/body divide in Western culture and the way rationality has been valued above emotionality and embodied responses has meant that musical forms strongly associated with dancing have long been regarded with suspicion in this worldview (Gunn 2016). Moral panics about various types of music, from jazz to rock 'n' roll to rave, have included elements of the perceived dangers of music that invites bodily responses, and this was part of the backlash against disco (Frank 2007). In the case of the Discobedience, however, being able to draw on this cultural memory of dance meant there were movements the organisers could incorporate into their choreography that already 'made sense' with the music. The evocation of the past via this 'accessible, non-hierarchical, and lowbrow' cultural object thereby facilitated engagement with the protest, making it easier to break social norms; not just protesting and taking up urban space normally reserved for cars, but singing and dancing with abandon in public.

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## Discobedience in Queer Time

At the risk, then, of committing an academic sin in introducing a (perhaps overambitious) new set of ideas at the end of a paper, I would argue that this opens up the potential for the queering of time. This takes as a starting point Halberstam's (2005: 13) argument that queerness itself has 'the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space'. This is connected then to the notion of 'queer time,' which is a different relationship with time that emerged in gay communities 'whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic' (2005: 2). Within these communities:

The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and ... squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand (Halberstam 2005: 13).

So while emerging from a fundamentally different crisis, those engaging with the climate emergency are also experiencing the sense of the 'compression and annihilation' of an expected future that could be mapped out in terms of 'those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death' (Halberstam 2005: 14), conducted within the inescapable confines of a capitalist system. This destabilising of what has been imagined for us, in terms of a future, enables – even necessitates – the imagining of new ways of living, whether in a world that has found a way out of endless-growth capitalism and its inevitable emissions, or its dark twin where the dire predictions of the climate scientists come to pass. Utilising this different way of thinking about time may prove to be a fundamentally important aspect of this, in that time – the clock, the calendar, the notion of efficiency – has been instrumentalised in the service of capitalism and profit-making (Lilja et al. 2015; Harvey 1989). Leahy et al. (2010) have argued that it is the inability of even those people who believe in anthropogenic climate change to incorporate its effects into their own imagined futures, which still focus on those same paradigmatic markers mentioned earlier and on finding paths to success as defined within consumer capitalism, that leads to an inability to take meaningful action on the issue.

This focus on the future is why I am suggesting that the Discobedience may allow a *queering* of time, rather than existing in 'queer time'. The ideas of inheritance and reproduction are important here, and at first it may seem that the stance of environmentalists is fundamentally different to what a queer approach may require.

Halberstam includes reproduction and inheritance as markers of life experience that queer time does not work to, and Edelman (2004) goes further in suggesting that the queer rejection of reproduction as a fundamental good leads to a rejection of the future and of hope. The environmental movement, on the other hand, often uses the figure of the child and evokes the 'next generation' as a motivating factor. Extinction Rebellion is no different in this, with stories of 'fear for my children or grandchildren' being commonly deployed as motivating factors for involvement with the group and ways to recruit new members. So rather than a crisis that leads to a greater engagement with the here-and-now, and the pleasures of the moment, as Halberstam suggested happened during the AIDS epidemic, the future is central to environmental activism. However, the type of inheritance suggested by XR might be called a radical notion of inheritance, which in its pessimistic form reduces 'inheritance' to the idea that future generations could even be alive at all or through 'climate justice' expands the idea to ensuring an inheritance *for all* (even beyond the human), as opposed to the heteronormative concept of passing down one's personal wealth to the offspring of one's body. Moreover, while the focus might still be on the future, this is not necessarily done in combination with hope; the notion of 'fighting without hope' is prevalent in XR discourse. In the XR handbook, Bendell states:

Putting all our hopes in a better future allows us to make compromises in the present, while letting go of a better future can allow us to drop false hopes and live in the present with more integrity. It might even make our activism more effective (Bendell 2019: 76).

The future that is being focused on is fundamentally uncertain, with even a best-case scenario requiring a complete change in what we have thought about as a 'good life'.

So while there is always the potential for a queering of time in a movement like XR, this may come to the fore when we are given opportunities to put the past, present and future in dialogue with one another in a way that disrupts the dominance of linear time. Use of the past allows this alternative temporality to come into being. Lilja et al. (2015: 420) suggest that:

Cross-temporal relationships imply how the present is non-contemporaneous with itself. Such asynchronous relationships between living and non-living dissolve the boundaries between presence and absence, fiction and reality, idealism and materiality, present and past, as well as subject and object.

They argue that this enables the development of empathy with those in other times and through this new script for social life and civic engagement. In the Discobedience, the destabilising combination of queer-coded 'lowbrow' popular culture from the past with gaiety in the present, in the context of a despair-laden future-focus, may offer space for this to occur. This may be enhanced further when done in combination with an action that is in some ways explicitly about time and how the experience of time occurs differently when you are using this song to disrupt the time of others, and the efficiency and clockwork-like nature of the CBD during a business day.

So 'Stayin' Alive', then, delivers a set of tools in terms of its recognisability and pre-existing associations with sexuality, fun and dance, as well as an easily reconfigured set of lyrics about 'life going nowhere' and of course 'staying alive' that allude to the climate crisis but are nonetheless delivered with irreverence and gaiety. The work that this particular song does in terms of tapping into collective and cultural memory in order to queer and destabilise time is at the core of its appropriateness for this event. The use of the music of a moment of hedonism, of celebration of identity and on one level the triumph of consumer capitalism (even in its exclusions) to draw attention to the potential destruction of all of these things and their role in their own destruction, while drawing on the energy and joy inherent in that moment acts as a way to invite reimaginations of the future that are not tied to the patterns that currently structure our lives, and may not even be grounded in hope: the future imagined may be one that does not exist. The Civil Discobedience has this potential because of the combination of gaiety and a common understanding of 'Stayin' Alive' rooted in its place in our collective memory. As I noted at the beginning, this can only be spoken about as potential; perhaps, at the end of the day, people just loved to dance on the street, and perhaps this reading of the possibilities of the action is pure speculation. However, given the urgency of this moment it seemed worth taking up Seymour's challenge to find new modes of environmental action and consider what new things they may offer in relation to this event that could, perhaps, make a difference.

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#### End Note

1. The action also included a 'die-in', where participants lie on the ground in silence for a period of time to signify the deaths that climate change will bring about, which can be seen in this video. Analysing this part of the action goes beyond the scope of this article.

#### invisible hostile employee

instance as explanation  
against glib transcription  
sufficient, valveless, no need to  
*vibe* the room

I begin by describing myself describing  
a dream of tripping down a staircase  
the fall plays on a loop  
cool institutional light  
leads to a cut-away  
of multiple rooms  
each signalling  
different moments of my life

when I speak my voice  
disperses  
touches a baby blue-tongue  
bothers the outsourced convenience class

we'll discover mist as sculpture  
then mist to show we're time-travelling  
mist cut by the high beam

burn-off amplifies  
the immensity  
of the folly

**ELLA O'KEEFE**

#### Schoolgirl

The long banks of windows disclose nothing  
of what goes on inside—and Chloe Saulnier  
does not actually formulate the question. Television

would inform her imagining—if the building were not clearly  
much older than any series she might have watched. Must  
it be more sombre, more severe than she can picture?

Chloe cannot tell—but sees a glass of water,  
tall; filled; standing somewhere near a window sill  
and a window, partially open, disclosing nothing of the view.

Grey walls. There is no soundtrack to this image—  
only a sense of quietness, of nothing changing, of time moving  
slowly by. This is 'recovery', a long waiting for health—

as experienced by an old person—a woman probably—  
though Chloe does not picture her, just her patience.  
Then she sees herself, viewed from above and distant,  
in her school uniform,

as from these windows.

**Peter Bakowski & Ken Bolton**

#### Ian Curtis tours America

I remember we smoked on the concourse  
behind the Pittsburgh bus station  
and didn't speak of class.  
We tied our wrists together and watched  
the ashes fall. You said, in the perverse  
fashion of the young, 'Age is no excuse  
in matters of dying'. But I was thinking of Vegas  
carparks, and the cool cables of the Golden Gate bridge.  
Though it was a ragged opportunity, a half chance at best,  
you clung to England like a machine for better living,  
though your moment lay before you  
like an uneaten rose.  
Now, all I have is that tar black taste in my mouth,  
and a tongue that tells me  
the big skies are falling in  
to disrepair.

**Shane Strange**

# Adored Pop Star or Freaky Artiste: The evolution of Harry Styles

HANNAH JOYCE BANKS

*Harry Styles is one of the most popular faces in the music industry, yet the scholarly discourse around him is lacking. Perhaps he is seen to be not worthy of study given his 'artificial' beginnings in a boy band created for the X Factor. However, the evolution of Styles has been a complex journey and his current presentation of fluid masculinity and fashion, undefined sexuality, and political activation, seem to demonstrate an original self. This article is a counter claim to the many ways that Styles has been constructed, instead presenting him as a cultural figure worthy of study. The discussion also contains discourse about the phenomenon and gender performance of boy bands, to explore Styles's evolution from a teenage heartthrob in chinos and polo shirts in 2010, to becoming the 2019 host of the Met Gala in a sheer blouse, heeled boots, and a pearl earring.*

KEY WORDS: Harry Styles; Boyband; Masculinity; Pop stars; Pop musics.

Singer, songwriter, actor and boy band alumni Harry Styles released his sophomore solo album, *Fine Line*, in December of 2019. For the unaware or 'uninitiated', Styles made his name in the record-breaking British/Irish boy band One Direction, who were formed on the *X Factor* in 2010 (Gross 2018: 5). Five albums, four world tours and one movie later they went on an indefinite hiatus in 2015. Since then, all five members have released one or two solo albums and Styles also made his acting debut in Christopher Nolan's war epic *Dunkirk* (2017). However, this list of achievements does not really begin to cover the potential impact of Styles. Allyson Gross (2018: 6) astutely describes Styles as 'a pop star of infinitely dissectible proportions' and writes that 'in the tabloids, his love life and sexuality are fodder for the masses; he is alternatively called a womanizer, a teen heartthrob, a queer icon, and the second coming of David Bowie'. This is a lot of identities for any one person to embody, especially when those identities and fame were thrust upon someone as a teenager and they are still now only in their mid-20s. In a 2019 *Rolling Stone* profile, Rob Sheffield (2019) described Styles as a 'curious kid who can't decide whether to be the world's most ardently adored pop star, or a freaky artiste. So, he decides to be both'. Being both seems to be working for Styles because at the time of writing, *Fine Line* is still in *Billboard's* Top 20 on the album chart after 67 weeks and his single 'Watermelon Sugar' climbed to number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in mid-August of 2020 (Trust 2020).

Styles has been one of the most recognisable and popular faces in the music industry for a decade, and yet the scholarly discourse around him is significantly lacking. Perhaps he has been seen to be not worthy of study given his 'artificial' beginnings in a boy band created for the *X Factor*. However, the evolution of Styles has been a complex journey from a manufactured young sex symbol to a man of his own creation. This development slowly occurred over the last decade and continually refers to the ways Styles was constructed by record labels and the media as a teenager. His current presentation of fluid masculinity and fashion, undefined sexuality, and political activation, seem to demonstrate an original and true self. While notoriously private with his personal life (except what he reveals through music), the current performance of 'Harry Styles' is not the presentation of an alter ego or a filter for self-protection, it seems to be genuine. In this article, I am presenting a counter-claim to the many ways that Styles has been constructed, instead presenting him as a cultural figure worthy of study. I believe that Styles's political activation began in One Direction, but the issues he was presented with were narcissistic (his sexuality, relationship status, and fashion choices). Perhaps this is a result of how boybands are portrayed in the media. Once you are branded as 'the sexy one' or 'the ladies' man' it is a difficult stereotype to escape. Nevertheless, throughout One Direction, Styles waved Pride flags on stage, lent his voice to movements like #HeForShe, and continually defended his largely female fanbase if they were denigrated in the media.

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In order to discuss Styles's evolution I will outline some of the literature that does exist, and explore his journey from a teenage heartthrob in chinos and polo shirts in 2010, through his burgeoning socio-political stance (or increasing awareness), to becoming the 2019 host of the Met Gala in a sheer blouse, heeled boots, and a pearl earring.

Since the age of sixteen when he first auditioned for the *X Factor* in the United Kingdom in 2010, Harry Styles has been surrounded by cameras. The now infamous footage of a devastated Styles, Niall Horan, Louis Tomlinson, Liam Payne, and Zayn Malik being told that they were going home, only to be brought back on stage as a new boy band has been viewed nearly four million times on *YouTube* alone ('The new groups – *X Factor* Bootcamp' 27 Sept 2010). One Direction may have finished third on *X Factor* but were immediately signed and sold millions of records worldwide to become one of the most successful acts to emerge from a reality talent competition. Despite this success, One Direction were often dismissed due to their beginnings as a manufactured boy band, a trend that 'can be traced back to the formation of The Monkees in the mid-1960s' (Gregory 2019: 11). In the article 'Fashioning a Post Boy Band Masculinity: On the Seductive Dreamscape of Zayn's Pillowtalk', Kai Arne Hansen (2018: 196) posits that 'The lack of autonomy that is commonly associated with boy bands positions them as inauthentic in the opinions of many audiences'. While it is important to note that despite fulfilling many of the expected criteria of boy bands, (clean and harmless masculinities, 'light hearted romantic sentiments' in their music, generally not playing instruments, and 'representations of sustained adolescence'), One Direction reinvigorated the format and according to Hansen distanced themselves 'from some of the hallmarks of the 1990s boy band aesthetic, such as matching outfits and synchronized choreography' (Hansen 2018: 197).

However, as Georgina Gregory (2019: 8) discusses in *Boy Bands and the Performance of Pop Masculinity*, 'what exactly constitutes a boy band is contestable'. Gregory (2019: 11) writes that, '[m]ost observers would have no difficulty in seeing the Beatles as a prototype for bands like Take That and One Direction, but it is hard to imagine the Rolling Stones fulfilling the label's prerequisites'. But even if One Direction marked themselves as different from their predecessors by not dancing and from the third album writing their own music, they were still born in a televised reality competition. This is a format which contests the 'long-cherished and Romantic vision' of the struggling artist who fights the commercial mainstream (Gregory 2019: 5). Gregory (2019: 5) asserts that this means 'unlike auteurs, who occupy a privileged place in the canon and academic literature, identikit pop groups have

always hovered on the margins of respectability'. Like the differing definitions and characteristics of boy bands, One Direction's rejection from the canon and derision from critics and scholars is complex. Nevertheless, they are absolutely worthy of study and as Gregory (2019: 5) writes, 'If nothing else, boy bands make us question the fetishization of auteurs and virtuosos, inviting us to reflect upon the fragility of masculine authority if it is so reliant on evidence of self-authored music or mastery of an electric guitar'.

Referencing Gayle Wald, Hansen argues that another reason boy bands are dismissed is due to their largely female fan base. Hansen (2018: 197) writes that the 'feminized mass of consumers with whom commercial artists are conflated' devalues 'boy bands on the basis of their popularity among female fans'. Harry Styles himself has tackled this judgemental perception and in an interview with Cameron Crowe for *Rolling Stone* in 2017 he said,

Who's to say that young girls who like pop music – short for popular, right? – have worse musical taste than a 30-year-old hipster guy ... Young girls like The Beatles. You gonna tell me they're not serious? How can you say young girls don't get it? They're our future. Our future doctors, lawyers, mothers, presidents, they kind of keep the world going. Teenage-girl fans – they don't lie. If they like you, they're there. They don't act 'too cool.' They like you, and they tell you (Crowe 2017).

However, at the height of One Direction's success in 2013 in the middle of their first stadium world tour, they were being derided by the 30-year-old hipster guy and their fanbase of teenage girls were constantly shamed and described as crazy. For example, in the incredibly problematic 2013 cover story for *GQ*, Jonathan Heaf described a One Direction concert thus:

Inside the venue a hormone bomb has gone off: 20,000 females all turning themselves inside out, some almost literally, to the sight of Harry Styles, Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, Louis Tomlinson and Liam Payne. *GQ*'s overriding feeling (as a 34-year-old man in a Burberry biker jacket with a notepad and pen) is one of hapless isolation, marooned between a 20-year-old mother of three girls to my left and five screaming teenagers all aged between 15 and 17 to my right. I am an interloper trapped within Harry Styles' very own *Lynx* advert - I'm scared, bewildered and ever so slightly deaf (Heaf 2015).

Among other hideous examples of sexism – Heaf described the power of boy bands as being able to 'turn a butter-wouldn't-melt-teenage girl into a rabid, knicker-

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wetting banshee' (Heaf 2015) – he also interviewed the members of One Direction. Heaf cornered the then 19-year-old Styles on his own, coerced him into revealing how many sexual partners he had, and then shamed Styles for the number being too low for a rock star:

GQ: Do you know how many people you've slept with?

Harry: I know the number of people I've slept with, yes.

GQ: What is that number?

Harry: I'm definitely not telling you!

GQ: Can you give me a rough, ballpark figure?

Harry: No!

GQ: Say "yes" or "no". Less than 100?

Harry: No!

GQ: So higher than 100?

Harry: No, it's definitely less than 100...

GQ: Lower than 50?

Harry: Yes, lower than 50.

GQ: Lower than 30?

Harry: I'm not doing this! You're cornering me!

GQ: Come on you're a rock star. OK, less than ten.

Harry: Yes. Two people. I've only ever had sex with two people.

GQ: I don't believe you.

Harry: Well, that's my answer. Read from it what you will! (Heaf 2015).

This is inappropriate journalism practice, especially considering that Styles was still a teenager, which makes this interrogation even more violating. Seven years later however, that very same journalist published another GQ article about the sleep story that Styles recorded for the meditation app *Calm* in July 2020. Heaf (2020) states that the sleep story was helping him through quarantine for COVID-19. He writes, 'Styles' voice pours over your troubles like runny honey over a toasted brioche bun ... Listening to Styles speak in this way, freely, even a little comedically, and certainly a touch erotically, has allowed me to consider prying open my own iron tautness, my own rigidity' (Heaf 2020). This strikes a very different tone and perhaps signifies some of the change that our society has gone through in this last decade. Although more cynically, it could be that Heaf takes Styles more seriously now that he's not in a boy band, is a solo artist who sometimes plays guitar on stage and is friends with Stevie Nicks. This is an issue that Gregory (2019: 5) also challenges when she questions the assumption that 'the texts and practices of mainstream pop bands have no value' and asks 'why we are only invited to appreciate these artists [boy band members] once they pursue a

solo career, reject pop or write their own music?'. While Styles is now on the solo artist pathway, he has never dismissed his boy band beginnings. He has carried One Direction and the fans with him into this second phase of his career and is carving out an original space within the current mainstream.

There have also been some other examples to suggest that boy bands and their fandoms are not as derided as in the past. The documentary *I Used To Be Normal: A Boyband Fangirl Story* (2018), the already mentioned Georgina Gregory's academic text (2019), and pop critic Maria Sherman's book *Larger Than Life: A History of Boy Bands from NKOTB to BTS* (2020), all suggest that more attention is now being paid to boybands and the fans that love them. Sherman also reviewed *I Used to Be Normal* for the feminist media website *Jezebel*, where she describes the documentary as 'undeniably delightful' (Sherman 2018). The documentary focuses on the fans behind boy bands without ever ridiculing or shaming them, and as Sherman (2018) writes, it is absolutely 'a celebration of adolescent absurdity, of sexuality, of the independence that comes with claiming ownership of an art artefact as your own for the very first time'.

Despite these cultural shifts, the academic discourse about Harry Styles in particular is still limited. This strikes me as odd, especially considering his evolution since One Direction began their hiatus in 2015. Gregory (2019: 7) writes that 'the soft masculinity purveyed by boy bands could even be deemed revolutionary. The boys' open expressions of vulnerability, the ease with which they express their emotions and their commitment to romantic love set them apart'. Styles is especially revolutionary in this regard because he has carried this soft masculinity with him into his solo career. He has never rejected his beginnings in a boy band and has played 'What Makes You Beautiful' (One Direction's first single) at every one of his live solo gigs. When boy band members go solo, they often completely reconfigure their image, explore a much more sexualised and hard masculinity, and there can be a lot of pressure for them to live up to their previous success. Examples of this can be seen in the early solo releases from Robbie Williams and his video for 'Rock DJ', the explicit content of Justin Timberlake's album *FutureSex/LoveSounds*, and Zayn Malik's first solo single 'Pillowtalk' which was released a year after he left One Direction. For the members of One Direction it is almost impossible to live up to their previous success considering that in five years they released five albums and did four world tours, two of which were in stadiums. While Styles's first eponymous album from 2017 was fairly well received by critics, in 2019 Styles said, 'When I listen to the first album now, I can hear all the places where I feel like I was playing it safe because I just didn't want to get it wrong' ('Harry Styles – Zane Lowe 'Fine Line' Interview' 22 Nov 2019). While this may be true

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to some extent there were still risks involved. But when Styles released his first solo single, a 6-minute-long Bowie inspired epic, and it shot to number one on many music charts, the risk clearly paid off.

Styles also continued to push boundaries in terms of his fashion choices, especially on his first solo world tour. His concert wear was a blend of masculine tailoring and silhouettes mixed with glam feminine fabrics and colours. The Gucci sequined blouses, Charles Jeffrey jumpsuits, ruffles and velvet flares were a distinct departure from his 2015 concert style of black skinny jeans and t-shirts, occasionally with gold boots or a Saint Laurent patterned shirt. One gets a sense of liberation from the solo era Styles, an artist and adult coming into their own. In a profile for *The Guardian* when *Fine Line* was released, interviewer Tom Lamont interrogated Styles about these fashion choices and his sexuality. Lamont (2019) suggests that some of Styles's outfits 'have fed into an important political discussion about gendered fashion', and claims that the sheer blouse and pearl earring that Styles wore while co-hosting the Met Gala in New York in 2019, 'challenged a lot of stubborn preconceptions about who gets to wear what'. In the interview Lamont also discussed the 'popular perception' that Styles is bisexual and wonders whether anyone has ever directly asked him about it (Lamont 2019). Styles responded by wondering why that question is even asked and said, 'It's not like I'm sitting on an answer, and protecting it, and holding it back ... It's: *who cares?* Does that make sense? It's just: *who cares?*' (Lamont 2019, original emphasis). When pushed further about whether his fashion, lyrics and album art are virtue signalling, Styles said:

Am I sprinkling in nuggets of sexual ambiguity to try and be more interesting? No. In terms of how I wanna dress, and what the album sleeve's gonna be, I tend to make decisions in terms of collaborators I want to work with. I want things to look a certain way. Not because it makes me look gay, or it makes me look straight, or it makes me look bisexual, but because I think it looks cool. And more than that, I dunno, I just think sexuality's something that's fun (Lamont 2019).

Discussions of sexuality and relationships have followed Styles his entire career, from being directly asked by interviewers as a teenager whether he was the womaniser of One Direction, to more recently being asked which of his solo songs are about his famous ex-partners. In the 2019 *Rolling Stone* profile Sheffield (2019) writes that, 'Harry likes to cultivate an aura of sexual ambiguity, as overt as the pink polish on his nails. He's dated women throughout his life as a public figure, yet he has consistently refused to put any kind of label on his sexuality'. On tour with One Direction, but much more consistently on his first solo tour in 2017/18, Styles

waved Pride, bisexual and transgender flags, along with the Black Lives Matter flag, usually during the One Direction cover he and his band performed of 'What Makes You Beautiful'. One of his guitars also features Pride and Black Lives Matters stickers, and one that reads 'End Gun Violence'. When Sheffield asked Styles what those flags represent and mean to him on stage, Styles replied:

I want to make people feel comfortable being whatever they want to be ... Maybe at a show you can have a moment of knowing that you're not alone. I'm aware that as a white male, I don't go through the same things as a lot of the people that come to the shows. I can't claim that I know what it's like, because I don't. So I'm not trying to say, 'I understand what it's like.' I'm just trying to make people feel included and seen (Sheffield 2019).

The growing political allyship of Harry Styles has also been mutually constructed with his fan base. In the article 'To wave a flag: Identification, #BlackLivesMatter, and populism in Harry Styles fandom', Allyson Gross (2020) suggests that Styles is an empty signifier and that the 'fans relate to him as a populist unifier and collective representative of the fandom's values, and mobilize his image for their own political purpose'.<sup>1</sup> Gross (2020) writes that many of Styles's statements where he evokes uncontroversial and vague ideas of 'togetherness', are 'Politics Lite'. This extends to the slogan that adorns his merchandise, his branding, and even a song title on *Fine Line*, 'Treat People With Kindness'. While it is a vague sentiment, adopting this ethos of kindness is perhaps a reaction to how Styles was treated by the media when he was first catapulted to stardom. It also could be read as a message to his fans/stans to continue practising kindness in an age where the backlash or cancellation by a group of fans against a figure can be incredibly harsh. Gross (2020) also suggests that despite Styles being hesitant to publicly discuss his politics (beyond supporting various causes or giving to charities), 'his fans have repeatedly made his shows political spaces ... fans brought LGBTQ+ Pride flags and Black Lives Matter signs with the intent to not only affirm their own identities within the "safe space" of his concerts (Khan 2017), but also to receive recognition and support from Styles himself'. In her article, Gross (2020) argues that in those 'safe spaces' fans are attempting to 'shift the pop star's own performed politics'. Frustrated that Styles was only picking up Pride flags during One Direction tours and at the beginning of his first solo tour in 2017, fans began bringing Black Lives Matter signs and flags, until they eventually were picked up and waved by Styles and Black Lives Matter stickers were added to his guitar. Gross (2020) argues that Styles is a signifier and that he 'becomes a representative embodiment of his own fandom's values through the mobilization of his image

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toward support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement'. I believe this suggests a reciprocal relationship between Styles and his fans. Through his expanding political allyship and his attempts to make fans feel safe at his concerts, fans respond in turn by pushing Styles further and challenging him to do more.

This mobilisation of Styles continued in 2020 in the wake of George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter protests that swept around the world. In an article for *Rolling Stone* Brittany Spanos interviewed several Black pop music stars who were frustrated at their idols only doing the bare minimum. Spanos describes a fan's reaction after they encountered Styles at a Black Lives Matter protest in Hollywood in June:

'I had seen figures like him at the Women's March and protests against Trump four years ago, but this is specifically for black lives', Angela says. 'This is specifically for my life, for my community. Harry Styles is at a Black Lives Matter protest. This is something I wouldn't have believed if someone had told me this two years ago' (Spanos 2020).

Prior to attending the protests in Hollywood, Styles had shared petitions on his social media accounts, but fans demanded more. Styles then wrote a longer post on Instagram and Twitter acknowledging his own privilege, promising to donate bail funds and signalling his desire to educate himself. But for fans like Angela, encountering him at a protest was different. Spanos goes on to describe their interaction in detail:

When they were face to face, she told him about her experience at his and One Direction's shows: the sea of white faces, her own developing sense of black identity, and the way she never felt certain that the inclusivity he preached was truly meant to include people who look like her. The masked Styles listened intently and gave Angela a hug before they parted ways. 'To see him out there ... it was just great to feel seen', Angela says. For black pop stars like Angela, that encounter with Styles was a rare moment of visibility in a genre with a loaded history of erasure (Spanos 2020).

The growing political activation and allyship has been a significant part of Styles's evolution from teenage heartthrob to original solo artist. This has also been supported by Styles himself growing more comfortable with his own identity expression as a young man with undefined sexuality and a fluid masculine sartorial presentation.

This shift absolutely began while he was still in One Direction taking tentative fashion 'risks' and calling out

interviewers for essentialist readings of gender. Styles did not simply emerge as an enlightened feminist for the 2017 Cameron Crowe interview that I quoted earlier in this article. It is interesting and worth exploring how this evolution began as a result of his experience in a boy band. Gregory (2019: 2) states that 'boy bands convey important information about gender identity', even if only a few academics have explored this subject. Gregory (2019: 3-4) writes that boy bands 'have provided young men with a vehicle for the expression of feelings that may be socially suppressed ... In particular, millennial boy bands illustrate how modern masculinity is less monolithic than previously, and is fraught with insecurity and instability'. While the scholarly discourse on these ideas may still be limited, there are many personal essays and think pieces which explore this. For example, in Alana Massey's 2017 essay 'Hold Your Laughter: Men Could Learn Something From One Direction' for *Mel Magazine*, she writes:

What if young masculinity didn't multiply its toxicity when it gathered, but acted as its neutralizer, or even an amplifier of the best that boys have to offer? One Direction had fans who adored them, not just for the love they professed for girls in their pop songs, but for how deeply they appeared to love each other. They worshipped fun rather than chaos; they elevated and adored girls and women, and were at their best when they were in each others' company (Massey 2017).

As Massey suggests, the members of One Direction are a unique example of positive pop masculinity and each member still discusses their time together fondly, while constantly reassuring fans that they will probably reunite someday. The exception to this being Zayn Malik. Following his abrupt departure from One Direction in 2015, he rebranded himself just as 'Zayn' and completely erased his boy band beginnings. Hansen (2018: 194-195) argues that 'Zayn navigates his transition into a solo career by setting up a diametrical relation between his past and present selves, thus attempting to shed the strictures of the various prejudices and expectations commonly associated with boy bands'. The song and video for 'Pillowtalk' contains provocative themes, explicit imagery and lyrics that deliberately draw connections between sex and violence, culminating in describing his bed with real life partner Gigi Hadid (who also appears in the video) as, 'Fucking and fighting on. It's our paradise and it's our war zone' (Malik 2021). The comparison of gender identity and the different performances of masculinity between Styles and Zayn absolutely demonstrates Gregory's point that 'modern masculinity is less monolithic' than it has been in the past (Gregory 2019: 4). Hansen (2018: 208-9) argues that Zayn completely rejected his past self and that,

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' "Pillowtalk" presents Zayn's relaunched persona as dangerous and compelling', through 'an audio-visual theatricalisation of destructive romance that sensualises female nudity and showcases male virility'. While Zayn perhaps chose the more expected path post-boy band, conversely, the solo career of Styles is much more representative of both his past and present selves, melding them to create a genuine expression of self. In his first solo music video for 'Sign Of The Times', Styles is alone and literally flying through a deserted landscape. This was then followed by the video for 'Kiwi' which depicts children dressed in Gucci suits having a cupcake war. Styles then enters the fray with an armload of puppies. When his music videos do involve other people, they are not aggressively sexualised, for example the fantastical love story between a boy and his fish in 'Adore You', or the enthusiastic celebration of women's pleasure in 'Watermelon Sugar'. In another direct contrast to Zayn's rejection of his past, in the 2017 film *Harry Styles: Behind the Album*, Styles happily discussed life in and after One Direction. He said:

When you leave a band, or boy band, you feel like you have to go the complete other direction and kind of say, 'Don't worry everyone, I hated it, it wasn't me'. [But] I loved it. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for that band, and I don't feel like I have to apologise for it. I never felt like I was faking it (*Harry Styles: Behind the Album* 2017).

Styles's presentation of fluid masculinity was evident in One Direction through his stage performance, behaviour in interviews, and his tentative experiments with fashion after he met his current stylist Harry Lambert seven years ago. But this fluidity has really blossomed over the first four years of his solo career. In December 2020, Styles appeared on the cover of American *Vogue* (the first solo male artist to do so), dressed in a lace-trimmed blue Gucci gown and tuxedo jacket. Ailish Wallace-Buckland (2021) wrote for *The Spinoff* that the 'conservative fallout from the cover focused on his apparent representation of the fall of masculinity in the west. "There is no society that can survive without strong men," tweeted US conservative commentator Candice Owens ... Owens condemned Styles' photoshoot and dress, and ended her tweet with a call to "bring back manly men" (Wallace-Buckland 2021). Styles playfully responded to the supposed controversy with an Instagram post of himself eating a banana and wearing a blue women's suit and ruffled blouse, accompanied by the caption 'Bring back manly men' (Harry Styles 2020). While the *Vogue* cover story and conservative backlash made headlines, Wallace-Buckland (2021) acknowledges that 'Styles is not the first to embrace androgynous style' and that 'in contemporary history, Black and brown queer, trans and non-binary people in particular have paved the way'. Styles is however continuing to push the mainstream

boundaries of fluid masculine and flamboyant fashion with every sartorial choice, especially with the ongoing partnership between Styles and Gucci's creative director Alessandro Michele. In the *Vogue* cover story Michele describes Styles as having 'the aura of an English rock-and-roll star – like a young Greek god with the attitude of James Dean and a little bit of Mick Jagger – but no one is sweeter. He is the image of a new era, of the way that a man can look' (Bowles 2020). This description is similar to the way Allyson Gross (2018: 6) describes him, but it would seem that as Styles matures and evolves as an artist that he has found a way to comfortably embody all these qualities.

The purposeful evolution of Styles is unique, as it is rare for members of boy bands to carry this level of success into their solo career. In the interview for the *Vogue* cover story, Styles reiterated to Hamish Bowles that he felt that he played it safe on his debut album. Bowles (2020) quotes Styles:

I think with the second album I let go of the fear of getting it wrong and...it was really joyous and really free. I think with music it's so important to evolve – and that extends to clothes and videos and all that stuff. That's why you look back at David Bowie with Ziggy Stardust or the Beatles and their different eras – that fearlessness is super inspiring (Bowles 2020).

Additionally, having just received a Grammy Award in 2021 for Best Pop Solo Performance for 'Watermelon Sugar', Styles now joins a small group – including Michael Jackson, Justin Timberlake and all the members of The Beatles – who have had success at the Grammys as solo artists post-boy band.

Throughout this article I have discussed the limited literature concerning Harry Styles, interwoven with discourse about the phenomenon and gender performance of boy bands, to explore how Styles has been constantly evolving over the past decade, into a pop culture figure worthy of study who is speaking back to previously demoralising narratives. While Styles could be read as a populist unifier who absorbs the political motives of his fan base, his gradual evolution and political activation suggests a performer and person who is defying the maligned trappings of a boy band to become an original expression of self. Perhaps Styles's delay in the adoption of #BlackLivesMatter is evidence of him maturing in the public eye, still encouraged and pushed by his fans, but also making up his own mind on reflection and attending a protest to affirm this position. Despite beginning in an 'inauthentic' reality television boy band, Styles has never rejected this past and instead carries it with him as he transforms into a magnetic and original artist. This growth was illustrated at the second Fine

Line album release concert he performed in London in December 2019. Styles let the crowd sing the final lyrics of 'Lights Up' on their own. His fans sang to him 'Do you know who you are?' and Styles replied, 'I do now' ('Lights Up Harry Styles Secret Show' 20 December 2019). The evolution of Styles from preppy boy band member to a mainstream representative of an alternative and fluid masculinity has taken place slowly over the decade of his career, and I have no doubt that he will continue to evolve. Harry Styles, adored pop star and a freaky artiste, is still at the beginning of his becoming.

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## End Note

1. See 'Who will be the first popstar to actually take accountability for their fan base' published on Junkee.com 29th July 2020.

# Everyday Life and Songs of Resistance in Manipur

PRITI LAISHRAM

*The merger of the princely state of Manipur with the Indian Union plays an important role in defining the present socio-political situation in Manipur. Songs form an important part of politics in Manipur. Songs become a medium through which dissent and resentment are voiced. This paper explores the relationship between songs of resistance and the dynamic political and social milieu which reflects and also shapes the reality of everyday life in Manipur. It seeks to understand the historical lineage of songs as resistance in context of social and political upheavals. With the help of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Manipur, it attempts to reflect on the present situation there and highlight the contribution of artists who engage with songs of resistance.*

KEY WORDS: India, Manipur, Everyday life, Songs of Resistance, Ethnography.

## Introduction

The use of songs to voice dissent and to resist is not new. Other than the use of varied genres, both political and social changes have drastically influenced the content of these songs. This paper explores the relationship between songs of resistance reflecting the dynamic political and social milieu shaping the reality of everyday life in Manipur. 'Reflects' is used in the sense that the everyday is where the politics lie. Songs of resistance are a reflection of the nitty-gritty of the everyday. Songs of resistance shape the reality in terms of information that is transmitted. This paper seeks to understand the historical lineage of songs as resistance in Manipur in the context of social and political upheavals. With the help of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Manipur, it also attempts to reflect on the present situation there and highlight the contribution of artists who engage with songs of resistance. The fieldwork was conducted in two phases in the dominant Meitei community in Manipur. The initial fieldwork was done between March and May 2016, and the second (and the main) fieldwork was conducted from March 2017 to November 2018. Participant observation and in-depth interview of artists and listeners/ audience were also conducted.

## Everyday Life and Resistance

The concept of 'everyday life' has been widely studied since the second half of the 20th century. This turn came when the focus of sociology studies increasingly shifted to the social interactions of the mundane and everyday life. Sztompka (2008) writes that everyday life seeks to

study the social events at a mundane level which is real and obvious. It is in the everyday that the 'embodiment and realisation' of 'social system, structure and social actions' takes place (2008: 35). He argues that the focus of everyday life is a new turn or a paradigmatic shift. There has been an increased study of everyday life including the various forms of resistance. In the context of resistance, one can understand the use of different ways or means to question the dominant forces. When individuals who may have to follow the rules of the dominant forces in spaces where the power restricts their voices and movements, they use any means to subvert the established rules that govern and restrict them. The major contention among scholars who engaged with resistance studies is what acts are to be called resistance. There are circumstances that do not give the opportunity or the resources to the oppressed for a large-scale movement or a collective movement such as armed struggle. In situations such as this, there exist subtle or partially hidden acts of resistance which become vital to look at in order to understand the people and the place. It is crucial to point out the kind of acts that fall into the category of resistance.

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) review various works on resistance and create a taxonomy where they look into different elements common to uses of resistance and found there is one underlying understanding common in all the work they examined. That is the understanding that resistance is an oppositional act. Johansson and Vinthagen (2014) write that the typology that Hollander

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and Einwohner suggest 'contradicts their simultaneous emphasis of resistance as a complex and ongoing process of social construction. Furthermore, their typology privileges consciousness as 'recognition' by or 'intention' of actors, which dramatically limits their scope' (2014: 2). De Certeau (1984) discusses everyday acts of resistance as tactics used by ordinary people to manipulate or exploit the order of things that are controlled by the dominant forces. Individuals are not merely passive receptors controlled by the established orders and rules but are those who indulge in acts who can escape the control of power. To understand resistance which is initiated by the marginalised or by the oppressed it will not be enough only to look at grand acts of resistance because it becomes crucial to understand the everyday acts of resistance. These acts of resistance which are scattered, are not collective and are partially or completely hidden from the dominant forces that are sometimes the best means for ordinary people to engage with the powers that they are not in control of. Seymour (2006) talks about the increasing focus of cultural anthropology on the concept of resistance. While talking about the everyday forms of resistance, the author says this form of resistance focuses on the 'small acts of defiance that do not constitute a social movement but that suggest a person's or small set of persons' dissatisfaction with the status quo'. (2006: 303).

These small acts of defiance are reflected in James Scott's (1985, 1990) work on everyday forms of resistance which has played an instrumental part in the field of resistance studies. Scott, in his book *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) noted that the most subordinated class did not have the 'luxury of open, organised political activity' (Scott 1985: xv). Scott shows that everyday forms of resistance were equally important as the larger collective resistance. In his later work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), Scott discusses everyday resistance in different cultures and societies. He discusses the relevance of infra-politics which meant 'a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (Scott 1990:19). These low-profile forms of resistance are shielded and given anonymity to the perpetrators of the act. He talks about the form of resistance which does not fall under collective opposition. The resistance he talks about are the everyday form of resistance which often go unnoticed or/and not regarded as a threat by the person or organisation it is targeted or resisting. Bayat (1997) studies the ordinary practices in large cities in Iran. He is of the opinion that the ordinary practices remained unnoticed because it was not like revolution. But its presence was felt only after decades. He argues these practices are prevalent in many developing countries. In this work, he talks about the poor people taking the urban spaces while illegally claiming the right over the place and says these acts are not extraordinary and occur on

a daily basis. He writes 'these practices represent natural and logical ways in which the disenfranchised survive hardships and improve their lives. What is significant about these activities, and thus interests us here, is precisely their seemingly mundane, ordinary and daily nature' (1997: 4).

Vallas and Courpasson (2016) argue that 'resistance requires the contexts, selfhood, friendships and kinship connections, possibilities of empowerment and relations to the world, as well as a sense of community through which people care more and think more about what they can do together to feel better or simply to survive' (2016:13). Music is not only used as a weapon to express dissent but also used by political organisations to further their agenda. Street (2003) talks about the use of popular music as a form of propaganda in election campaigns. He says songs and sounds are powerful weapons as music directly relates to the emotions. Denisoff (1983) talks about the use of propaganda song and says the purpose of it is to create political or social consciousness for a movement or the individual who is using it. Morant (2011), while writing about black popular music, discusses the role of the artist. The author writes that the artist moves away from being just an entertainer and takes a pivotal role in terms of narrating stories of past and present, thus also expressing and shaping the dissent and resentments that many share. Similarly, in Manipur the artists tell the stories of the past and present. The dire socio-political conditions are reflected in their songs shaping the way people could express and share their experience. For many people, it brings awareness of issues that are happening and to many others it becomes a voice that represents them. Music also serves as a means of connection and forging new ties, forming solidarity and reasserting identities in a place where people are marginalised and face social exclusion.

It's true for diasporic communities (Gilroy 1993) and also for racially marginalised communities (Martinez 1997 and Morant 2011). Bennett (2015), while talking about community and music, says there are two main ways community is applied to the study of music, firstly, locally produced music becomes a means for individuals to identify with a place. It becomes a way through which an individual connects to a particular place. The second is music creates a way of forming new commonalities among individuals who did not have any shared experiences before. Music then becomes a way of life on which a community is formed. The first one is particularly relevant in my study as songs of resistance become a means through which individuals who migrate to places connect to a place that they have left. These songs generate emotions of longing, fear and belongingness. Songs of resistance generate cohesion, solidarity among the audience. It provokes

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individuals to think and to reflect on the dreadful state they are living in. It is sometimes a call for immediate action or urging the audience and listeners to unite for a collective action (Morant 2011). The songs also sometimes have the ability to subvert the power and generate a narrative where listeners and audience feel a sense of hope, and give them strength to resist. The song represents the aspiration of the suppressed and marginalised. Fonarow (1997) writes that there is 'an emotional feeling of community and connectedness' between the artists and their audience when it comes to independent music (1997: 364). The singing of issues may not initiate an immediate action in terms of protest, but the songs generate a sense of oneness and brings connection among people with shared experience of trauma and pain. Music is a symbolic force which helps create a shared identity. Music has a capacity they believe to generate, sustain and define group identity' which makes it an important form of political expression (Appelrouth and Kelly 2013: 301). Music that is prevalent in conflict situations, particularly music which talks about a social-political issue tends to have the ability to provoke the masses and also ignite a strong emotion. Music reflects on the historical, social and political context of a place. It helps bring a sense of solidarity and belonging (Grant et al. 2010).

Bennett (2005) writes that while using the musical texts, 'individuals also symbolically engage with the everyday, the conventions of play, pleasure and protest associated with collective participation in music, facilitating a symbolic negotiation of everyday life in contemporary social settings' (2005:118). Artistic work touches protest lyrics which reveal internal discontent into personal and social needs and motivation. When the songwriter writes a protest song, he or she voices a complaint either overtly or covertly. The writer narrates painful experiences through artistic ways.

### **History and Songs of Resistance**

The merger of Manipur is a contentious issue. An organised armed struggle soon followed. Manipur has seen decades of violence from both ends of the spectrum with the self-determination movement on the one hand and the repressive state machinery to curb the movement on the other. In order to fully understand the present socio-political situation of a place it is important to look at the historical context. In this study, it is crucial because of the long presence of violence and conflict which has shaped the way people resist. This gives rise to various acts of resistance which are not only confined to organised resistance like armed struggle but also the use of art. British dominance prevailed in Manipur till 1947. In 1948, Manipur went on to establish a democratically elected government with a full adult franchise and a constitution (Naorem 1988 and Kamei 2016). The

merger with India took place in 1949 and became the vital period which shaped the socio-political landscape of the state. The Indian state instead of dealing with the democratically elected government chose to engage with the then titular head, Bodh Chandra Singh, Maharajah of Manipur. Parratt and Parratt (2015: 56) write that the Indian state 'instead persisted in dealing with the former feudal ruler, who himself repeatedly protested that he had surrendered his power to the elected assembly'.

Manipur was not given full statehood in the union after the merger. It was given Part C status which allowed the central government to reduce the status of the independent kingdom into a symbiotic relationship with India. Arambam (2015) writes Part C erased the 'efforts of self-governance and people's democracy by Indigenous communities' (Arambam 2015: 105). Even though statehood was finally bestowed in 1972 after a bitter and long struggle, the self-determination movement was already underway. An armed struggle resulted from the merger and the subsequent ill treatment of citizens in Manipur. The Indian state retaliated against this struggle by imposing a repressive law The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA).<sup>1</sup> The self-determination movement launched by various underground organisations which is still ongoing aims to address and fight what was considered as the annexation of Manipur by the Indian state.

Hijam Irabot was an important political figure in Manipur who started the communist movement. His political relevance has been discussed and widely written about. In 1948, under his leadership, the communists in the valley of Manipur organised an armed struggle against the monarch and the elected government but the movement was suppressed by 1951. The movement that Irabot initiated had a ripple effect on the self-determination movement. His contribution in the field of art and culture still holds an important place in Manipur. Irabot's songs were about the need to fight both feudalism and colonialism, the need for peasant resurrections, unity among different communities and issues concerning the oppressed, marginalised and the down trodden. Yurembam<sup>2</sup> remembers Hijam Irabot during the Nupi Lal (women's war that evolved into a broad movement for reform) saying that he 'led the agitation by singing songs that produced a dynamic effect on the minds of the people'. Elangbam<sup>3</sup> writes, 'while working among the peasants in Sylhet and Cachar, his creative spirit found expression in songs and dances associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association (I.P.T.A.) movement and aroused the artistic consciousness of the villagers'.

*Taro Jaidhuni Taro*, is a song which he wrote in Sylhet jail. It urges the people to shed their differences and unite against the oppressors. He tells of the victory of

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the masses and the need for unity to gain freedom. This song reflects not only the oppression that the masses face but the internal conflicts and division of the society. I quote here a few lines:

*Taro jaidhuni taro taro*  
*Leibak leibak khudingda miyamna oiri jai*  
*Mukti gi lanbanda pairine phiral*  
*Swadhintha numit thoklak le*  
*Manipur macha nakhoi kadai*  
*Taro jaiduni taro taro*

Translation:

Listen to the sound of freedom  
Flag flying on the fort of freedom  
In all the lands, people have won  
In the land free, the flag wave  
The day of freedom has come  
Where are the children of Manipur?  
Listen to the sound of freedom

Nongmaithem Chittaranjan Singh (popularly known as Pahari) was one of the founding members of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). The UNLF demanded the right to self-determination of Manipur alleging that it had been annexed to the India Union. He is considered to be one of the greatest modern Manipuri singers. In his memoir *Eigi Diary Dagi (From my Diary)* he writes of his musical journey and takes the readers to the early stages of the UNLF (Pahari 2008). He talks about how people outside Manipur did not know them, and they did not even know where Manipur was located and also about the discrimination they faced outside Manipur. In an interview conducted with a former member of the UNLF<sup>4</sup>, regarding the use of songs as tools of their struggle, he said, 'The organisation had a strong conviction that freedom was inevitable. But it understood India's power so the UNLF held the position that the people of Manipur should be first made aware and [are] educated about why we need a revolution. They also believed that culture plays an important role, it is a backbone for any revolution'.

Arambam Samarendra, another founder of UNLF, was also a well-known playwright. Both Pahari and Arambam Samarendra were engaged in developing Manipur Nationalism through their songs. Arambam Samarendra's song *Chaikhre Ngasi Nangi Loubukta* is still very popular. The translated lyrics were found in the book given on the Arambam Somorendra Memorial Lecture from which the lectures were compiled. Here are a few lines from this song:

*Chaikhre ngasi nangi labuk ta*  
*Nacha singi ekhengna*  
*Nangi leisa da tinduna*  
*Thungi leihao onnanaba*  
*Asangbi phige thonbi palem o*  
*Nungsibi Manipur*

Translation:

Today on your fields is strewn  
The blood of your sons  
To merge with your soil  
That it may be nourished  
For seasons forthcoming  
O green phige-clad Mother  
O beloved Manipur!

When Pahari was arrested in 1969 the government banned his song named *Hey Ima Manipur*. This song depicts the love of the motherland and the indebtedness towards the land. I quote a few lines from the song.

*Khomlang laman singamloi nanggi*  
*Minungshi chaobi hey ima*  
*Naoyok naokon kaojaroi nanggi*  
*Minungshi chaobi hey ima*

Translation:

Indebted to you for nurturing me  
Hey compassionate mother  
I will not forget how you raised me  
Hey compassionate mother

In the late 1960s, the state started cracking down on the rebels. In 1969, Arambam Samarendra went underground. Pahari was arrested on 21st November 1969, sent to Imphal Jail and later shifted to Agartala jail on 10th March 1971. Imphal was already working in *All India Radio* when he was arrested for waging war against the Indian State. When statehood was granted to Manipur in 1972, Pahari was given amnesty and when he was released from prison he continued his singing career.

### **Songs of Resistance and Contemporary Manipur**

In this section I would like to address the artists who are now singing songs of resistance. It will explore how they

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started their bands and writing songs about socio-political issues. The section provides a background on the artists and their band members and their positions in the politics in Manipur. It deals with three bands namely Eastern Dark, Tapta and Imphal Talkies which are presently active. Based on the interviews conducted with the artists, firstly, I document the history of the band, the purpose of forming the band, and the reason behind singing songs of resistance.

### Eastern Dark

Eastern Dark was established by Heishnam Malemngangba Lokeshwar. The beginning of his career as a journalist also initiated and ignited his concern for socio-political issues. When I asked him the reason behind the name of the band, he replied, 'we living in the east are living in this dark, in every aspect it's dark socially, politically and anywhere you look. So the name came from that. Our lifestyle and geographically every aspect of our life are dark'.

When I met Lokesh, he spoke about his journey and recording. He said during his time cassette tapes were widely prevalent. Lokeshwar's first album, *The Monkey Lies*, never reached an audience. Before it was circulated the master copy was lost, and the album was banned. When asked about the kind of songs that got such attention from the government Lokeshwar said he has forgotten the lyrics. His second album *Monkey Truth* was released and widely circulated. One of the songs named *A su a ningbani* describes the situation in Manipur. Below are a few lines I quote from the song:

*Kuki su kuki ningjabani*

*Naga su naga ningjabani*

*Meitei na Meitei ningbani*

*Pangal na pangal gi khanjabani*

*Mareibak ningbasu yaodana*

*Mareibak khanbasu yaodana*

*A su a ningbani*

*B su b ningbani*

*C su c bu ningbani*

*Nasa na nasabu ningnaraga*

Translation:

Kuki<sup>5</sup> is devoted to Kuki

Naga<sup>6</sup> is devoted to Naga

Meitei is devoted to Meitei

Pangal<sup>7</sup> is devoted to Pangal

Nobody is devoted to their land

Nobody is safeguarding their land

A is devoted to A

B is devoted to B

C is devoted to C

You are only devoted to your kind

When I enquired about his reason for singing songs on socio-political issues, he narrated how he felt about AMMIK.<sup>8</sup> He told me that 'there is an association of artists who sing Hindustani music known as AMMIK. It organised a seminar and abused me and Tapta Jayanta. They accused us of erasing and tarnishing Manipuri songs. What we were thinking is that there is no particular way of singing, for them it was more of romantic songs, for us it was an attempt to bring social change. The genre can be whatever but we were thinking of bringing social change in some way'.

### Tapta

Jayanta Loukrakpam, popularly known as Tapta, which is also the name of his band, started in the mid-90s. Jayanta's songs cover a wide range of topics. Tapta says 'I sing about the things I see, the things that are happening around us. I never thought of it as a protest'.<sup>9</sup>

His songs are directed towards the atrocities meted out by the State, the struggle against AFSPA, the problems in the State ranging from ethnic conflicts to corruption. One of the songs named *Oh Black Law* describes the situation under AFSPA. Below are a few lines from the song:

*Bazaar da ambush tousille*

*Army na awu awuba kapkhair*

*Oh.. hakchangna machete machete tarare toirare*

*Angangba ikhengna wa wa chenthare*

*Shetna khainabagi kholaona Nillare*

Translation:

Ambush in the bazaar

Army shooting anyone at sight

Oh, the pieces of human flesh scattered and smashed

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## Floods of blood

The day filled with the pangs of panic and separation

In a conversation I had with Tapta, he told me how he started singing about social and political issues. He said he never realised his songs had a message. He did not know what social issues were, when he sang *sou sou, bad boy* and did not know it had a message to it. He believes that the reason he sang the songs he sings which are based on issues may be because he was married and had three children at that time when he started it. He told me if he had been unmarried he would be singing romantic songs. 'It all came to me naturally, be it a role of a bad boy, a father or mother it came all naturally. When I sold Abok, there was huge profit and then it struck me that I could earn by singing about social issues. To be honest, my art is commercial. You cannot survive without money. But I am not like the ones who are in commercial music right now, those who are addicted to gifts and offering, I am not like that'.

A professor at Manipur University was the first person to tell him about it. He said he sang about the things he saw around him without ever thinking it to be political. Singing about socio-political issues to him was like a 'natural calamity' that happened naturally. I asked him why he named it Tapta. He told me what doing music meant in those times when he started out. At that time Manipur was engulfed with the rising presence of drug users. He told me about his family being restricted and his discomfort in using his own name.

### Imphal Talkies and the Howlers

Akhu Chingangbam is the singer and songwriter of the band Imphal Talkies and the Howlers (popularly known as Imphal Talkies) whose first album *Tiddim Road* came out in 2009. Akhu Chingangbam says, 'I never think of it as a protest song or political songs. That is how I feel; this is about the world I live in'.<sup>10</sup> Akhu's songs are direct, and he does not shy away from criticising both the State and non-state actors. His songs bring out day-to-day life under violence. His songs also bring out the need for peace and address the long term effect of violence on people and children especially.

*Rolling Stone* magazine named 'Imphal Talkies and the Howlers' as the voice of northeast India. Un-convention: In Place of War Project also selected the band for the music album compilation titled 'album of revolution' released in the UK. It was one of the 33 bands from 33 countries which got selected. Akhu and his team also organise a festival called 'Where have all the flowers gone?' every year. He says the purpose of this is to 'bridge the rural-urban gap, about the environment and also to promote

local independent music and artists'. Akhu also received a grant from 'India foundation of Arts' for a project to 'create a musical performance based on notions of Manipuri identity that lie embedded in the literature and folklore of the Meitei diaspora'.<sup>11</sup>

Fake encounter is the name of one of the songs of Imphal Talkies which is dedicated to the families and friends of all the individuals who were killed in the alleged extrajudicial executions in Manipur. I quote a few lines from the song,

*Micham kaya hatpagino nangna phiral da salute khatpa*  
*Thawai kaya gi medal no nangi thabakta thetliba*  
*Kananana hatlo haibano aduk penna hatpadi*  
*Pellabara nang nang tumba yabara*  
*Ngasi su khangli cheitheng lukhrabi kayana*  
*Lising ama chounga khun nipan gi mikhatki achumba wayel ngairi*

Translation:

For how many murders do you give salute under the flag  
For how many lives hangs that medal on your chest  
On whose orders have you murdered so foul  
Are you now satiated yet, how do you sleep at night  
The widows are still mourning facing the abuse of the powerful  
Yet still fighting for justice for the 1528 who were killed

When I first visited Akhu, I asked him about his band and how he started his journey. He said that Imphal talkies did not start as a band; he lived in Delhi and did a physics honours degree in Delhi University from Sri Venkateswara College. He made friends there but never knew how to speak English or Hindi. So he deduced 'It was maybe that out of isolation I picked up the guitar which a friend from Bishenpur had left in my room. I started learning with that. I really sang covers of people's songs but I could never do it well'. He mentions that he tried hard to imitate people but all in vain so he started singing newspaper headlines.

His experiences in Delhi shaped Akhu's journey. While talking about how it all started. He remembers:

... and then I started to feel how we do not look like others in Delhi because of that it was not possible to gel with people and their culture. When we walked on the street people were disrespectful. So I started internalizing to write poems, I did not play the guitar much those days. At the same time, I was into

beat poetry, I like those in the beat generation so I started writing my own poem. Even though I was writing, I never thought I would sing.

Akhu recollected the time he performed in various protest events when he was in Delhi. He mentioned the protest related to Kashmiri issues and to the Bhopal gas tragedy. When I asked how he thought of calling his band 'Imphal talkies', he answered he had two reasons. He said:

we used to bunk school and went to watch cinema in Imphal talkies. We did not watch much cinema. Elders used to look at us as very naughty children who came to this place where vulgar cinema was screened. We used to go inside quietly and carefully. So that sense of innocence and nostalgia was there.

Another reason revolved around the style of songwriting. He said, 'I think if I was born somewhere else I do not think I will have this way of singing or way of song writing. If I was born in Kangpokpi<sup>12</sup> I might be writing but there is something about Imphal. I wanted my music to represent Imphal. I had this sense that I wanted it to be the talking Imphal'. When I asked him how he decided to sing on socio-political issues, he responded, 'People always ask why do you write protest songs, but the most important thing is I never think of it as protest song or political songs that's how I feel, it's the world I lived in'.

The above artists who are presently active in Manipur circulate their songs via social media, and concerts/crowd-funded events. These spaces play an important role in circulation of the songs and also in forming a close link between the artists and the audience. According to the interviews conducted and the conversations I had with the audience who came to the concerts, all my respondents agreed that the songs are political and an important form of resistance. However, they did differ in terms of the effectiveness of these songs in bringing changes. None of the artists I interviewed agree that they are protesting or resisting but say that they are singing about the things that are happening around them.

## Conclusion

Songs have been used in varied ways. They are used to address a specific issue in society, to question a repressive structure, to promote a political agenda. This paper has attempted to highlight the use of songs to narrate a story of struggle and daily negotiation of individuals with their socio-political situation. The historical context gives a glimpse of the socio-political issue at the time when the artist wrote and sang the songs. It tells us the relevance of the songs at a particular point in time. Over the years,

the themes of these songs have changed. Each of the songs presents different stories and experiences of the people. It reflects the socio-political situation of the place. The reality of the place and its people are intrinsically woven into the songs.

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**End Notes**

1. Armed Forces Special Powers Act was passed on 22 May 1958. It gives power to the army to arrest, search and kill anyone on mere

suspicion and the act provides impunity to the army from legal actions. AFSPA enables the armed forces to carry out counter-insurgency operations with impunity.  
 2. <http://matamgimanipur.blogspot.com/2012/08/irabat-and-social-and-cultural.html>  
 3. <http://themanipurpage.tripod.com/history/irabat.html>  
 4. Name withheld  
 5. A tribal community in Manipur  
 6. A tribal community in Manipur  
 7. Manipuri Muslims  
 8. Apunba Manipur Matam Ishei Kanglup (AMMIK) exercises significant control in the Manipur music industry. Music artists in Manipur have to be a part of this organisation if they want work in the Manipuri film industry. If they are not part of AMMIK then their music cannot be used in Manipuri films. A certain amount of money is also paid to AMMIK every time a member of AMMIK performs in a concert. It also screens the music before its release. Earlier, local TV channels did not televise any music videos produced by the artists who are not enrolled in the organisation. The organisation, on May 1st 2018, changed its rules to allow non-members to circulate their music via local TV channels but their songs still go through mandatory screening. Eastern Dark, Tapta and Imphal talkies are not part of AMMIK and are independent artists.  
 9. Interview conducted on 15 July 2017  
 10. Interview conducted on 8 July 2017  
 11. <http://indiaifa.org/grants-projects/ronidkumar-chingangbam.html>  
 12. A town in Manipur

**URBAN ARCHIPELAGO**

The boys rush to Quiapo;  
 all summer they waited  
 for waters to rise and soon jump  
 in again. The underpass now  
 closed to vehicles, trapped water  
 as an Olympic-sized pool. One  
 by one they dive  
 into the brown, deep  
 bombs launched  
 with closed mouths.

Our seasoned driver waits  
 until the tricycle makes it  
 across the raging muck—  
 it doesn't. We are on the  
 same  
 boat; the jeepney hopes  
 it does not float. The trike  
 captain makes a sign of the  
 cross.

Under a flyover, the riding-in-tandem is stuck:  
 No easy kills tonight. Our guns and money,  
 we must not get wet. Your orange raincoat  
 calls too much attention.

**Vyxx Vasquez**

# The MacGyver Approach: Teaching economy of availability in tertiary music education during COVID-19

BRIONY LUTTRELL, LACHLAN GOOLD AND ANDY WARD

*In this paper, we explore a pragmatic approach to tertiary music education. We propose that the conflation of tool, technique, and technology (Graham 2017: 19-20) has led to a situation where dominant music education models too often focus on teaching what you use to make music with rather than how you make it or why, and as a result are dependent on privilege and access. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique situation in which to test these ideas due to the enforced disruption to established ways of teaching and learning, in particular the radical pivot to online-only delivery. We explore our experiences of rethinking tool-based tertiary music education in this context and focus on our MacGyver (1985-1992) approach to music making and communicating information. We argue for the potential of a pragmatic approach in music education as one that follows music industry practice of an economy of availability and takes a step towards addressing inequities and the socialising of music making.*

KEY WORDS: music education, COVID-19, higher education, DAW, pedagogy

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic provides some unique challenges and opportunities for the education sector generally (Belluigi et al. 2020). Due to lockdowns and physical campus closures, universities were required to pivot courses to an online delivery format, in some cases with minimal lead time, which has come to be known as 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al. 2020). Although the higher education sector has been shifting towards online teaching and learning for years, COVID-19 provided a unique set of circumstances where universities were forced to teach online or not teach at all. This is a particular challenge for disciplines and courses, like music, that typically involve and rely on access to specialist spaces and equipment.

In this paper, we share our experiences of the COVID-19 higher education 'pivot' as the music discipline staff at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia. We do so in order to highlight a perspective on tertiary music education which the unique circumstances of 2020 helped us clarify and enact. We contextualise this with research in order to explore some of the key themes and argue for the potential of this perspective in contributing to a more industry-reflective and socialised model of practice-based tertiary music education.

The University of the Sunshine Coast is situated in regional Australia with a large geographical footprint

along with students and staff from diverse backgrounds. We are the youngest university music discipline in the country and our courses are nested as a major in the Bachelor of Creative Industries degree, and as university-wide electives. Approximately 75 students make up the 2020 cohort and include some students with little to no prior musical experience in music making and creation.

In 2019, after a review of global tertiary musicianship pedagogy ranging from conservatoire models to contemporary music programs like that of Berkley, the music discipline undertook a complete rewrite of the music curriculum at USC. As teaching staff, we are all primarily industry practitioners who also have decades of teaching experience between us. As industry practitioners, we are guided by our practice in our approach to pedagogy. While we do not seek to legislate creativity (Davis 1989), we place significant importance on providing practical skills for our students to engage with industry.

We acknowledge there is a disconnect between tertiary music study and current commercial and popular industry practices to a level where we see conservative approaches to music pedagogy as a hindrance to students developing meaningful and sustainable careers as creative practitioners (Ewell 2020). In response to this, we argue for a pedagogical model based on the development of

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unique intellectual property by way of song writing. In this way, our teaching focus is on building students' agency over their own creative practice through developing the skills associated with the two primary artefacts of the song as defined by industry practice (APRAAMCOS nd): the sound recording, and the performance. As a result, all coursework is embedded in industry level practices of song writing, production, and performance.

This three-pronged model allows us to approach learning design in a pragmatic way that is dictated by the act of making new music rather than by a set curriculum of established tools and techniques. In this paper, we define pragmatic as concerned with action, an approach to problem-solving that is led by practical considerations. While in its elemental stages, this pedagogical methodology has allowed for students of all capacities, and socio-economic backgrounds to engage in music making practices that generate intellectual property for exploitation to market. While some will critique our approach as harshly capital-led, we argue that if we are truly invested in the sustainable career of the student, agency over the means of production (of a song) is essential.

When COVID-19 started to impact our capacity to teach in-person, we were forced to rely on our pragmatic approach to music pedagogy. We, like many universities, were faced with the prospect of having to compromise our learning outcomes in order to maintain the delivery of courses in these new circumstances. This was a compromise we were not willing to make. While instruction of performance, delivery of theory, and song writing practice can all be reasonably taught via virtual classrooms, each of our courses also included a music production element that became challenging to deploy outside of a dedicated studio or lab environment. The question became how can we ethically and equitably teach song writing, production, and performance without the facilities, tools, and learning experiences provided by a university campus?

### **Nail it in With Whatever You've Got**

Since 2015, music streaming is the largest source of music revenue in the United States (Datta et al. 2018). Hip-Hop is the largest streamed genre since 2018 (Stone 2019; Watson 2020), and is predominantly based on the creation of functional music using the tools available to the practitioner. Turntablism, and the second rise of the Roland 808 are just two examples of how Hip-Hop creators used the tools available to them to produce innovative and practical music. This is not unique to Hip Hop, but it is perhaps the most recognisable example of recent years. We use the term *economy of availability* to describe an environment where access to tools is restricted or defined by external circumstances such as

social, cultural, economic, or geographic factors. Herein lies the conceptual overlap with MacGyver (1985-1992).

Whereas the economy of availability describes the limitations of access, 'MacGyvering' foregrounds pragmatism and creativity in the act of selecting and using the tools one has access to, often in a new way, in order to solve a problem or 'do something'. MacGyvering describes an innovation in technique, guided by technology, that is synergistic with the tools in the economy of availability. In this way, MacGyvering is a cultural shorthand for what we might otherwise refer to as *hacking* (Darvasi 2016: 103-104) or *bricolage* (Kincheloe 2001: 680). In this context, we emphasise 'the resources at hand' and 'making do' aspects of bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 17-18). Conceptually, we are describing the complex interwoven relationship between the things we do, the things we do them with, and for why or what purpose.

It is important to make a distinction between the terms *tool*, *technique*, and *technology* here. Graham (2017: 19) defines the terms as such: 'tool (a thing to be used as part of technique) ... technique (how it is to be used) and technology (literally, the logic of technique; the *reason* for using it)'. For music education purposes, a specific digital audio workstation DAW would be the tool, how you use the DAW is the technique, and song writing and its production would be the technology.<sup>1</sup> Graham goes on to discuss the issues with this conflation of terms:

By using 'technology' to describe tools, techniques, and technologies, the motives for using a given tool or technique are automatically obscured, which means that the elements of choice and ethics are also obscured ... Contemporary usage of the term 'technology' has been removed from its artistic, skilful origins to mean a class of 'things' with which we do work: tools. (Graham 2017: 20)

The impact of conflating these terms in music education, for example viewing the DAW as the technology not the tool, is that we often end up teaching the tool rather than the technique or the technology. In effect, allowing the tool to guide priorities in learning design which may downplay or obscure the how and why. We contextualise our claim with the findings of Klein and Lewandowski-Cox's investigation *Music technology and Future Work Skills 2020: An employability mapping of Australian undergraduate music technology curriculum*:

Australian music technology educators seem to be prioritizing specific (technical and creative) skills over higher-order applications of skills and knowledge which are contextualized in their broader social and cultural contexts (Klein and Lewandowski-Cox 2019: 637).

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Despite philosophical arguments over the conflation of terms, learning and creating music relies on having access to certain specific tools (for example equipment including DAWs, microphones, instruments, recording studios). COVID-19 forced an economy of availability in the pivot to students learning from home, therefore the teaching strategy had to adapt techniques and technologies over a wide variety of tools. In other words, we were teaching students to 'hit the nail in with whatever you've got that does the job'.

### **Music as Tool-Focused Pedagogy**

Music making and listening practices are inherently tied to tools (Théberge 2001), often mislabeled as technologies. These range from the more obvious equipment used in studio recording to instruments themselves. However, any physical or conceptual thing that extends human capacity and improves efficacy can be labeled as a tool (Brown 2015: 6-7). For music, this means that things like equal temperament, metric time, Western functional harmony, and notation are also tools. Unfortunately, these conceptual tools are often regarded as exclusive rather than being treated as just one of many available choices of tool when looking to participate in the act of music making or listening. This framing is particularly apparent in conservatoire and error-correction models of music education (Ward and Luttrell Forthcoming).

Error-correction based pedagogy focuses more on the 'correct' use of specific tools and techniques, rather than concepts of technology bound to the action the tool is being used for. We argue the prominence of this approach in tertiary environments is largely due to the ease of assessing the use of a tool or technique, over the higher-level cognition of why they are being used. Specifically, it is easier to correct the angle of a bow, or the deployment of counterpoint than it is to assess what social action the cellist or composer is inherently bound up in whilst making music. In this approach, the emphasis is on learning and developing an approved range of tool-specific techniques, with minimal discussion of the ethical or cultural meaning of the act of using the tool or technique (Ward and Luttrell Forthcoming).

In our approach to pedagogy, we reject error-correction methods of music instruction and like Ewell (2020) argue that Western music theory is only a tool in a larger technical system. The selection of Western music theory, and its error-correction methods, as the predominant tool of music education in the academy is inherently bound to concepts of cultural dominance and white superiority (Ewell 2020). The error-correction method is a way for music educators to maintain this problematic theoretical framing without ever having to address the social and cultural acts surrounding it. In conservatoire models, the

question of how a student gains access to an expensive Western orchestral instrument, or the financial and personal support to develop tool-specific techniques with years of specialist instruction and practice are not significant. Economy of availability in this model takes for granted that access is equal and not a privilege of centuries of white European cultural dominion. Although this example might seem disconnected from the context of COVID-19, it is an important theoretical underpinning to our argument and a clear example of how problems of privilege and access can be exacerbated by tool-focused pedagogy.

Music production is another ingrained example of tool-focused pedagogy. Perhaps because it is still a relatively new field, with the possibility of recording emerging in the late 19th century. At a tool / technique level, it is an area where pedagogy appears to more closely align with music industry practices. This is of particular significance when considering the relationship between technological development and economy of availability. The recording studio is a place that is continually in flux (Slater and Martin 2012). In broad terms, the recording studio has emerged in three distinct temporal phases; the laboratory era; the factory era; and the current domestic (or do it yourself (DIY)) era (Goold and Graham 2018). We argue that the domestic era is most relevant to modern music production pedagogy.

The domestic era is dominated by a democratisation of recording processes that are; portable; utilise autonomous approaches to learning new recording techniques; software-based with considerable manipulation of digital audio; defined by the scarcity (or expense) of purpose-built recording space; and allow for more time to develop a completed production. While MIDI and sample-based recording dominate this era, software-based analogue studio emulations also enable full ensemble recordings providing the appropriate recording space is found. So too, production is often interwoven in the song writing process. The efficacy of the recording studio has often progressed with the increased capacity of recording tools (Anthony 2015; Leyshon 2009) and popular music regularly utilises the affordances of those progressions in the recording process.

Popular music studies in higher education are well established, with many universities and private higher-education facilities offering music technology related courses (see Klein and Lewandowski-Cox 2019). Many of these institutions have constructed elaborate recording facilities to teach music production. Music production is considered a key pillar of popular music pedagogies, particularly where song writing and production merge into a single practice. Tobias (2013: 215) states:

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Given the creative processes and decisions involved in producing popular music, and the increasing role that shaping sound through digital means plays in creating a wide range of popular music, producing can be seen as a way of composing or creating music.

Music production pedagogy in higher education appears to centre on 20th century studio recording practices, including the requisite expensive industrialised recording spaces like those of the factory era. In an example of this, Anthony (2015) argues for a recording pedagogy to mirror professional practice through a live full-band recording experience. Factory era style recording spaces incentivise students to complete assessment on campus using expensive equipment they otherwise would not have access to at home. An insidious by-product of these facilities is that they speak to certain genres of music being created in them, particularly those that rely on in-studio and ensemble performance approaches. Unfortunately, many of the 21st century's largest genres, such as Hip-Hop, are more illustrative of domestic era recording practices than factory era.

If music is frequently conceived of and deployed as a tool-focused pedagogy, in a situation like COVID-19 where access to tools changes radically then how do we go about adapting in an ethical, equitable, and useful way? As Belluigi et al. (2020) remark about higher education more generally, 'What the pandemic has made near impossible to ignore, are equity considerations in HE.' We began to realise a great disservice currently occurring in modern music pedagogy, namely: if we have to compromise the learning outcomes of students because they cannot access bespoke tools, then we are not assessing the students' capacity to make music – we are simply assessing the quality of the tools they use. Or in other words, the level of privilege involved in a music student's access to privileged tools. Not only does this prove an issue of ethics and equity, but how useful is it for students to only learn how to make music with a set of bespoke tools that they most likely lose access to after their degree is complete? That is unless they are in a position to purchase, or commercially negotiate access to, these tools in order to allow them to continue to participate in the act of making music.<sup>2</sup>

### **Macgyvering During Covid-19**

As a result of the impacts of COVID-19, we and our students found ourselves faced with an economy of availability that placed significant limitations on the set of tools with which to teach and make music. There were large variations in access to tools across our student cohort. We found the assumption that every student would have access to personal computers able to run

communication<sup>3</sup> and musical software as well as access to reliable internet service<sup>4</sup>, especially when dealing with streaming video, was flawed. During in-person learning this is compensated by providing facilities that are equipped with computers and relevant software, and with the university being responsible for the cost of these purchases and subscriptions. In order to be equitable, we had to be flexible, and not mandate the use of particular tools while providing extra technical support for a multitude of tools. In semester 1, AVID was providing Pro Tools amnesty licenses but this was not continued in semester 2. This resulted in our teacher demonstration pivot towards free or subscription-based tools like BandLab and Hookpad. We encouraged the use of samples and audio instruments, which replicates music industry practice as well as helping to mitigate access issues to microphones and audio interfaces. To record vocals and other acoustic sounds, we developed material for using the types of microphones that students were likely to have access to, such as ones inbuilt in their computers or smart phones. Although students still had some access to campus spaces and the ability to borrow some equipment, many students lived long distances from campus or had travelled interstate or overseas prior to lockdowns and border closures. Our three-pronged approach to curriculum meant that we had to find a way to teach song writing, production, and performance as an act that could be realised in any digital audio workstation (DAW) with any equipment.

As a team, we made a decision to co-teach all of our courses in order to provide students with diverse expertise, a more dynamic and conversational learning experience over Zoom (so we could model the type of dialogic interaction we wanted from the students), and to allow us to manage teaching a diverse cohort of learners in real time. In the initial transition week, we released a set of online learning materials on how to set up and optimise their home computers with Zoom and some audio software. This helped to triage problems for our first online synchronous class the week after. We provided many hours of in-class and additional support to students to customise and troubleshoot their particular set ups, often by remote access to student computers. During classes and additional meetings, we demonstrated the act of using audio software to create new songs, including the unavoidable pragmatic problem-solving when something did not work as planned. We found this to be one of the most valuable parts of the experience in that we as educators were modelling problem-based learning with the students as a community of practice (Sarrazin 2018; Wenger 1998). In the MacGyver problem-solving method/paradigm our song writing decisions were motivated by our creative intentions, rather than starting from the functionality of the software. This approach to music pedagogy has some very meaningful implications

for developing higher-order cognitive skills in students but we want to acknowledge it required us to be much more adaptable and responsive as teachers and facilitators than in tool-focused approaches.

By emphasising the technology, that is the song writing, performing and production, we were able to maintain learning outcomes despite the unprecedented circumstances. Our pre-COVID efforts to design curriculum and assessment focusing on higher-order cognitive skills helped with this. Our assessment of the outcomes put the emphasis on how and why students were using tools and not the tools themselves. Learning experiences were about making the song, with the selection of tools and techniques MacGyvered to achieve the student's artistic intentions. Learning design proceeded from a level of abstraction where standardised techniques were relevant and useful despite the tool used, teaching a concept that could be applied in multiple situations. Teaching the students how to 'make do' in this situation is potentially the most valuable pedagogical outcome. Pre-COVID, the ability to make do and make music was representative of a significant part of music industry practice. Since COVID, MacGyvering in an economy of availability has become the way our industry is surviving.

## Conclusion

We acknowledge our specific circumstances meant that we had control and flexibility in our pragmatic response to adapting to the challenges of COVID-19. We are very grateful to our students for trusting our approach and being patient and open-minded in what was a year of radical changes and global trauma. It remains to be seen what kind of lasting impact COVID-19 will have on both the music industry and education sector, but the unique conditions of 2020 have helped to bring to the surface some deep-rooted issues that might have otherwise continued without challenge. Interrogating tertiary music education in terms of tool, technique, and technology helps to highlight some of the issues of access and privilege that are ingrained in many of the prevalent tool-focused models. In our experience, reframing tertiary music pedagogy to be about the technology – the why – is a way to more closely align with music industry practice and teach music making as a social act. We emphasise that there is much more work to do on addressing the inequities in music and music education but we offer our experiences of using a pragmatic approach to music pedagogy as an effective approach to explore this.

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Dr Lachlan Goold's research focuses on the recording studio, music production practice, and government legislation affecting the music industry. Lachlan has an extensive career as a music producer and has won two ARIA awards for his work. Having worked with some of Australia's finest popular music acts, Lachlan continues to engage in recording, mixing and production. Lachlan continues research in recording studio practice with a focus on remote and regional areas, the broader music industry, and the implications of alcohol-related violence legislation on the music industry in Queensland.

Dr Andy Ward is a researcher focusing on songwriting, music theory, sustainability, and popular culture. Andy brings his years of industry practice to academia previously working as a songwriter, producer and performing artist. Today he continues to work with major record labels and music publishers on developing songs and artists from around the world. His research is focused on decolonising music hierarchies, narratology-based music inquiry, performance technology, music industry research, regional and remote music, sustainability in creative economies, and further establishing songwriting-as-research methodologies.

### End Notes

1. Another example is functional harmony as the tool, how you use functional harmony as the technique, and songwriting or composition as the technology.
2. We acknowledge that music making tools are much more affordable at this point in history than ever before, but the cumulative cost of multiple tools is still prohibitive to many people. It is problematic when access to certain tools is treated as gatekeeping to the act of 'professional' music making.
3. The university had designated Zoom as the preferred platform for synchronous online delivery. This was to be recorded and made available for asynchronous learners.
4. Something that appeared to impact our students more so than those attending universities in metropolitan centres.

### Close to Home

This lake says *oofta*, something my Minnesotan mother might say while walking bent-over uphill or something that I might say while dusting books for years untouched, the ashy stories flying straight into my eyes and blinding me with their language. Mine's a quieter *oofta* than hers, though equally substantial.

Because I want to be in lakes or on them or by them how had I missed this an hour out of the city's symmetry? *Oofta*, a gentle shock gushing forth, the lake like us in our earlier years growing out of desperate sex and swimming deeper, where less words needed saying though when we spoke we saw bubbles.

*I love you today, as if you were a lake.*

Minnesota is a lakeland where I drank Dr Pepper while drying in the sun, my young body growing and endless, a photograph stored in a shoebox in my parents' closet back in Florida, where children lecture adults through megaphones

*guns are bad / guns are bad / guns are bad*  
and they should know.

The day before we left for the lake I picked up our son at the usual spot, the shade of the gumtree still near the roundabout, the couch still by the crooked mailbox outside the brittle house – not everything had changed in the two hours since I'd heard the news of the school shooting: my son's backpack still like a shell on top of his long and skinny legs, his skin so white, his eyes so large – not everything had changed.

The bottle from the last winery on the way to this lake is still cold as we toast the lake while watching the lake baptise itself again and again. No train schedules here. Here, there are twigs to gather. No local pubs. Only purple swamphens in the reeds.

Tell me you feel the ripple too – a leaf fallen by the breeze, a dog's bark shaking the surface of the lake and the *oofta* vibration that it makes, an oar lifted by our son coaxing out the water's words, like uncovering a memory then stowing it again.

The lake hears our stories too, drowns in every one.

**Heather Taylor-Johnson**

# Incorporating Resistance Practices in Hip-Hop: How Kendrick Lamar morphed from Black Saviour to Black Salesman

KRISHAN MEEPE

*Black cultural practices have a rich and storied history of political resistance. Messages have been encoded into the sounds and lyrics of songs for centuries to circumvent institutional control of Black knowledge. Today, hip-hop has become a global voice for marginalised peoples and the most consumed genre of music in the US. However, Black politics have not found the same mainstream representation as black artists. This article examines the work of rapper Kendrick Lamar and argues that by moving away from a politics of resistance on his 2015 album *To Pimp a Butterfly* and catering to a mainstream audience on his 2017 album *DAMN.*, Lamar has fallen victim to the process of incorporation by the mainstream culture industry. By accommodating an audience that ignores or misreads the political history of hip-hop and Black resistance, Lamar has unwittingly transformed cultural resistance into cultural capital.*

KEY WORDS: Blackness, resistance, incorporation, identity, hip-hop

## Introduction

Rapper Kendrick Lamar released his breakthrough album *To Pimp A Butterfly (TPAB)* in 2015 to widespread acclaim from fans and critics alike. His fusion of jazz, soul, and hip-hop, laced with incendiary critiques of institutionalised racism in the United States, struck a chord of pro-Black<sup>1</sup> sentiment at the genesis of the Black Lives Matter movement. His hit single *Alright* became an anthem for protestors, following a failed attempt by police to arrest a 14-year-old boy in Cleveland, Ohio. Fox News criticised the lyrics to *Alright*, with anchor Geraldo Rivera saying, 'Hip-hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years' (Unruly 2015<sup>2</sup>).

Three years later, Lamar became the first rapper to win a Pulitzer prize for his 2017 triple-platinum album *DAMN.* On *DAMN.*, however, Lamar distanced himself from his political views and delivered a more accessible sound whilst simultaneously, hip-hop became the most consumed music genre in the US (Nielsen Music 2018: 31). Shifting his sound in line with mainstream trends, and catering to a homogenous, white audience in the process, Lamar found the kind of success rarely seen by black artists. While one can view this as a grand achievement not only for Lamar, but for hip-hop as a whole, I believe the de-politicisation of his music and mass consumption by mainstream audiences, rendered it inert as a force for socio-political change.

In this article, I argue that by straying from his politics of resistance on *TPAB* and catering to a mainstream audience on *DAMN.*, Lamar has fallen victim to the process of incorporation by the mainstream culture industry. By accommodating an audience that ignores or misreads the political history of hip-hop and Black resistance, Lamar has unwittingly transformed cultural resistance into cultural capital. To explore this phenomenon, I will firstly discuss how racial identities are produced. Drawing on Butsch's (2001: 74) conceptualisation of incorporation as a tool of hegemony to nullify resistance, I will explore how black artists must express themselves through tropes created by dominant institutions (Asante 2008: 20), controlling their identities (Love 2016: 62) and commodifying their cultural ideas (Brooker 2014: 222). I will then examine the messages encoded into *TPAB*, conceptualising the album as an educational text speaking directly to Black audiences, before arguing that *DAMN.*'s message indicates Lamar has internalised hegemonic ideals of blackness.

## Constructing Blackness

Before we can understand how racial identities are incorporated, we must understand how they are constructed. Lamar grew up in Compton, California, the spiritual birthplace of West Coast hip-hop, but also a city shaped by a history of racist policies and institutional control. After the 'Second Great Migration'

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and the fiery 1965 Watts Riots, the larger South Los Angeles area experienced 'white flight' as middle-class whites fled the area in fear of brewing racial tensions. Additionally, property owners engaged in the practice of 'redlining': reserving housing areas considered hazardous, for minority applicants by outlining them in red on city maps, relegating them to areas increasingly subject to urban decay. Such practices systematically enforced racial divisions and the ghettoisation of black communities, leading to ongoing over-policing and media demonisation.

Lamar's upbringing illuminates one aspect of racial identity: blackness as a political construct born of oppression. A relationship to blackness that is forced upon a subject through lived experiences of racial discrimination. This discrimination crosses class boundaries and reduces fully formed humans to a single colour, an unfortunate by-product of the legacy of white supremacy that liberal democracies are founded upon. When spruiking the virtues of freedom and equality, it is important white liberals are aware of how their national identities are shaped by a cultural-political history rooted in conquest and genocide (Love 2016: 62). As Asante (2008: 20) elaborates, the images of blackness we are sold in liberal democracies are simply another form of control. More than just unconscious biases, stereotypes function as a way for oppressors to justify their treatment of the oppressed. The images oppressors produce – the gangster, pimp, hoe, person of colour, even the 'real' or 'conscious' rapper – are all one-dimensional prisons of image. These images are accepted, internalised, and reproduced by the oppressed, enacting their own defeat. If minorities cannot control how 'real' is constructed, how can we live an authentic life? How can our cultural practices speak truth to power?

As Tricia Rose (1994: 17) has argued, contemporary cultural practices are deeply shaped by the commodity system. This creates an institutionalisation of cultural practices that Theodor Adorno dubbed 'the culture industry'. Black cultural practices within this industry must speak to both a Black audience, and a larger, predominantly white context. As post-colonial, liberal democracies are founded upon systems of white supremacy, racial minorities must develop what Du Bois influentially labelled 'double consciousness' (2007). This entails an understanding and acceptance of normative behaviour, to minimise one's marginalisation within a society, whilst simultaneously being able to identify the shortcomings of the system; retaining a sense of personal identity and a link to one's cultural heritage. Mainstream representations of Black culture lacking double consciousness have an othering effect; a symbol of rebellion, or forbidden narrative, holding the power to fascinate white audiences without directly involving them. Subsequently, according to Rux (2003: 4), race

must not be thought of as real but as a constructed Dream. Blackness and whiteness are not inherent, but exist only as social constructs to affirm racial identities. These identities are expressed through symbolism, skin colour being but one such symbol.

Viewing hip-hop from this perspective where political contestation is central, Lamar's musical output has become, as Cornel West feared, 'highly packaged, regulated, distributed, circulated and consumed' (quoted in Brooker 2014: 222). Because these aesthetics are defined by, and serve, white hegemony, Lamar's racial symbolism has drifted from blackness towards whiteness. Ironically, white audiences are unable to decipher these symbols from within the white hegemony they have created, lacking the double consciousness it takes to view representations of black people as more than a racialised other (Love 2016: 47).

Though not completely inaccessible to white audiences, *TPAB* makes numerous references to Black history and iconography whilst paying tribute to an Afrocentric musical heritage. By coding messages into his work about historical Black icons and almost exclusively sampling African American artists, Lamar constructs a form of blackness that Arzumanova dubs 'proprietary' (2016: 423). It is owned by, and speaks directly to, Black audiences, all from the platform of a major music label. 'I don't know what to call this album,' co-producer Terrace Martin says in an interview with *Complex*. 'Some people call it jazz. I just call it a bunch of the homies playing, and going hard. It's heavily jazz-influenced, but it's heavily black in general! We didn't listen to the Beatles to do this record. No disrespect' (2015). While blackness can be a tool employed by state powers to create and disempower a racial 'other', blackness is of course defined by Black people. Black cultural expressions operating within the culture industry are expected to speak to the aforementioned larger white context. To speak directly to a Black audience then, is a radical move; a prioritisation of Black desire over white expectations that poses a tangible threat to the American state.

As Butsch (2015: 91) describes, there is an ongoing intellectual battle between hegemony and resistance within capitalist structures. While resistance is reliant upon understanding hegemonic power, hegemony is in constant flux, giving it the power of incorporation. This is the process by which resistance practices are 'corralled and rearticulated within the framework of hegemony' (Butsch 2015: 91). Incorporation is the oppressor's most insidious weapon. It is consumption personified; the symbols of the resistance reproduced by the hand that holds the whip. Resistance practices are stripped bare of political content and transmuted into commodities to

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be sold back into the mainstream. Dominant institutions treat subcultures as little more than a source for fashionable products representing a meaningless and acceptable form of adolescent rebellion (Butsch 2001: 77). Butsch does not suppose incorporation to be the end of resistance however, as hegemony and resistance can never truly be complete. Instead, he calls for a more nuanced understanding. Untangling Lamar's process of incorporation may then prove fruitful to understanding cultural resistance.

### Championing the Resistance

Much of the disempowerment minorities face is the result of a divisive status quo instituted by state powers. In the culture industry, this translates into a devaluation of minority cultural practices, racial or otherwise, which can have lasting effects on communities. On *TPAB*'s opening track 'Wesley's Theory', Lamar tells the listener how he originally participated in the music industry out of love, but soon became enthralled with the power it afforded him. He initially hopes to use his power to create political change:

I'ma put the Compton swap meet by the White House  
Republican run up, get socked out  
Hit the prez with a Cuban link on my neck  
Uneducated, but I got a million-dollar check like that

However, he finds his newfound power is an active threat to the status quo, and the powers that be have an interest in tearing him down. He discovers the material riches wealth afforded him were not desires of his own, but in truth, actively pushed upon him as a means to abrogate his newfound power.

What you want you? A house or a car?  
Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar?  
Anythin', see, my name is Uncle Sam, I'm your dog  
...  
And when you hit the White House, do you  
But remember, you ain't pass economics in school  
And everything you buy, taxes will deny  
I'll Wesley Snipe your ass before thirty-five

This reference to African American movie star Wesley Snipes, is an allusion to the criminal charges and ensuing imprisonment he faced for tax evasion, a cutting reminder that black people in positions of social and financial power are not beyond control. Using the character of Uncle Sam to represent US institutions exploiting black artists who lack economic education, Lamar illustrates the education

system's failure to empower marginalised communities to make informed decisions. Powerful institutions like the IRS can then further exploit those communities, preventing them from gaining independence and continuing the cycle of marginalisation. Lamar implies this is an intentional tactic, that the music industry itself is designed to rob black artists of power and maintain the institutionalisation of white supremacy. He confirms as much in an interview for MTV:

It talks about something that we weren't taught in school. When we get this money. I've spent all my time in school, and in escaping prison, and escaping the system. So you mean to tell me, the moment I become successful and I get some money and I don't know how to manage my money, that you gon' throw me back in jail? For taxes? (2015)

Lamar encoding this message into his music both illustrates the pain of black experience, and converts his art into an alternative mode of education with the power to speak directly to Black audiences. 'I put that through my music to give game to the kids that's not being taught in them schools, it's up to me, 'cos I'm going through it' (MTV 2015).

On the song 'Institutionalized', Lamar delves into his struggle escaping behaviours he learned growing up in Compton.

What money got to do with it?  
When I don't know the full definition of a rap image?  
I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it  
Institutionalized, I keep runnin' back for a visit, hol' up  
...  
Institutionalized, I could still kill me a nigga, so what?

Here, we see Lamar struggling to reconcile his newfound fame and fortune with his personal identity. Not understanding the 'full definition of a rap image', he becomes 'institutionalised' by the tropes rappers are expected to fulfil to maintain high-profile positions. Although Lamar grew up with gang members, poverty, and violence, he has never fitted the role of 'gangster' or 'pimp' et cetera. 'He's a nice guy,' proclaims rap icon Snoop Dogg, 'so they have a problem with it' (Thisis50 2013). These lyrics expose a troubling issue for black artists and African American cultural expressions within the culture industry. Not only are black artists forced to satisfy hegemonic stereotypes, these stereotypes conversely mould black artists. Lamar finds himself running back to the ghetto 'for a visit', unable to reconcile his new powers with his marginalised identity. Despite

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gaining the upward economic mobility he sought, he finds his identity in conflict. He finds himself free from economic institutions, but remains trapped by social ones. 'After a lifetime of embodying difference, I have no desire to be equal,' writes Black feminist author Reni Eddo-Lodge. 'I don't wish to be assimilated into the *status quo*. I want to be liberated from all negative assumptions that my characteristics bring' (2017: 184). Until action is taken against this type of epistemological violence to transform institutions into wholly inclusive spaces, change can never be realised and Black knowledge will continue to be devalued and eradicated.

These institutions do not only hold power over black people who have escaped economic instability or have a public profile, they also control everyday citizens. On 26 July 2015, police arrested a 14-year-old African American boy for allegedly being intoxicated on a bus at a Black Lives Matter event held at Cleveland State University. As Pitchfork reported, attendees at the event blocked the police vehicle from leaving until the boy was released (Gordon 2015). 'We gon' be alright!' – the hook to Lamar's hit single 'Alright' – was the celebratory chant that broke out, cementing the song as the anthem for the next generation of Black activism. In the song, Lamar raps:

Nigga, when our pride was low  
Lookin' at the world like, 'Where do we go?'  
Nigga, and we hate po-po,  
Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho'

This stanza highlights the tension between African Americans wanting to express their culture and identity, and the widespread police violence and discrimination they are met with. A tension symptomatic of the white supremacist foundations of the American State, and liberal democracy's inability to address this issue (Love 2016).

While Lamar's expressions of black experience were not met with the police violence or censorship that predecessors such as N.W.A. or 2 Live Crew faced, they were met with strong criticism from conservative media. In 2015, Lamar opened the Black Entertainment Television Awards with a live performance of 'Alright', rapping from the rooftop of a vandalised police car while a tattered USA flag heaved in the background. A Fox News panel took particular umbrage with the display. 'Oh please. Ugh. I don't like it,' Kimberley Guilfoyle said. 'I get it, that's his right to express himself, let the free market decide, personally it doesn't excite me' (Unruly 2015). The panellists then accused Lamar of inciting violence. 'This is why I say that hip-hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years,' retorted Geraldo Rivera. He continues to say that linking

the white supremacist 2015 Charleston church shooting, with systemic police brutality towards black people is, 'So wrong, so counter-productive, it gives exactly the wrong message.' While this can be viewed as an inconsequential misreading of Lamar's work by media personalities catering to a conservative viewer base, the panel takes a somewhat sinister turn. 'It doesn't recognise that a city like Baltimore ... 7 percent the size of New York, has just as many murders as New York.' Here, Rivera implies the real issue is not the effects of institutionalised racism, but black-on-black crime. Crime that should be policed more comprehensively, as Rivera gave the call to action: 'We've got to *wake up* at a certain point and understand what's going on here'.

### Model Minority

To this day, racial hegemony successfully perpetuates whiteness as default in neoliberal democracies. As black people and Black liberation politics gain visibility within mainstream discourse, a new method of self-protection must be devised. If explicit racism or racial violence is no longer a common part of life, does this mean racism is over? Rather than excluding racial groups, we experience what Kwak (2019: 1709) calls, 'racial realignment', that is, 'the resignification of multiculturalism as part of neoliberal governance'. This phenomenon allows the American state to define what is and is not racially acceptable, to control racialised bodies so they cannot further destabilise neoliberal democracy. By carefully selecting 'model minorities' to be included in state sponsored media, hegemony corrals racialised others into political frameworks of whiteness. In turn, minorities idealise white standards and legitimise symbolic racial violence instead of advocating for structural change. This culminates in a reproduction of whiteness as normative, morally superior, and culturally dominant.

Symbols of 'acceptable blackness' are commodified and consumed by white audiences, controlling the boundaries of black identities. In developing the idea of 'gender as consumption', Kay Siebler proposes, '[i]n a culture where consumption is a way of life, a way to validate one's existence, a way to display one's status and worth, queerness has been co-opted' (2015: 139). Applying this framework to racial identities, the fetishisation and commodification of African American experiences allows whites to buy into blackness. By signifying elements of blackness through consumption, whites are able to adopt the 'cool' of African American cultural practices, inoculate themselves against accusations of racism, and ignore demands for structural change. It has become increasingly accessible for whites to cover their laptop cases with 'Black Lives Matter' or 'Anarchist' stickers, don their favourite rapper's new sweatshirt, and say the n-word at hip-hop shows whilst black people look away

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in discomfort. 'When I go to work, thousands of white people scream the word n\*\*\*\* at me,' rapper Noname tweeted in 2019. '[I am] consistently creating content that is primarily consumed by a white audience who would rather shit on me than challenge their liberalism because somehow liking Lizzos [sic] music absolves them of racist tendencies' (Consequence of Sound 2019). As figureheads who do not serve Black interests control the institutions black artists are forced to use to express their message, black bodies become incorporated into the politics of whiteness, moulding boundaries of inclusion and exclusion through commodity.

Although I have argued that blackness is a political construct that exists outside of, and in resistance to, hegemony, this does not mean black people within the mainstream should be denied their status as Black. No minority group has ever been freed without help from those in power. Appealing to, collaborating, or even identifying with mainstream white audiences, bears no inherent wrong. Building solidarity across racial lines, particularly from a Black perspective, is an important act. Black people do hold power in shaping Black symbolism, even if it may serve white interests. It is not the act of becoming mainstream or catering to white audiences that erodes blackness, but the commodification and sale of Black politics as cultural capital, for personal gain. In Lamar's case, we see this manifest as a shift in political goals on *DAMN.* While *TPAB* saw Lamar searching for an answer to internal conflict and finding it in Black political resistance, on *DAMN.* we find him searching for a different perspective. A central theme throughout the album is the relationship between wickedness and weakness, exemplified in the opening track 'BLOOD.':

[Intro: Bëkon]  
Is it wickedness?  
Is it weakness?  
You decide  
Are we gonna live or die?

A decided move away from the hints at class conflict and social power divisions, these lines about wickedness and weakness consider personal choices. Confusingly, this new message about personal demons undermines his previous work of raising class-consciousness. He asks the listener whether his demons are a sign of one of two options and to deliver judgement upon him, granting life or death.

During the song 'FEAR.', Lamar's cousin Carl Duckworth is heard on a voicemail saying:

The so-called Blacks, Hispanics, and Native American Indians  
Are the true children of Israel  
We are the Israelites, according to the Bible  
The children of Israel  
He's gonna punish us for our iniquities, for our disobedience  
Because we chose to follow other gods  
...  
That's why we're in the position that we're in  
Until we come back to these laws, statutes, and commandments  
And do what the Lord says, these curses is gonna be upon us  
We gonna be at a lower state in this life that we live  
Here, in today, in the United States of America

Here we find Lamar's central narrative for the album: his internal wickedness is a result of God's damnation. Until they are able to return to God's commandments, racial minorities are doomed to live in a 'lower state' in life. Lamar discusses his ideological shift in an interview for *Beats 1*:

The best way for me to put it, To Pimp A Butterfly would be the idea of ... changing the world ... *DAMN.* would be the idea: I can't change the world until I change myself (2017).

Here, Lamar explicitly states his belief that responsibility for social change rests solely on the shoulders of the individual. No longer does he believe institutional change is the key to restructuring society and ending marginalisation of minority groups. Instead he embraces the neoliberal doctrine of changing oneself to meet the expectations of society. Lamar's rise to fame appears to have cost him his 'double consciousness' and led him to internalise hegemonic ideals. 'The roots of these injustices are political, they're social, they're economic, to blame it all on God's will just kinda seems disgusting to me', popular music critic Anthony Fantano declares in his review of *DAMN.* 'Bordering on self hatred and, most definitely self-flagellation. And, in my opinion, the exact *opposite* of being conscious' (Theneededrop 2017). Lamar's perspective here conflicts with the core message of *TPAB*. Turning his back on the unique identity he created on *TPAB*, he plays into non-threatening tropes of blackness that are palatable to the culture industry, crafting a new identity that is no longer proprietarily Black.

On the lead single from *DAMN.*, 'HUMBLE.', Lamar also faced criticism for his lyrics about women. He raps:

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I'm so fuckin' sick and tired of the Photoshop  
Show me somethin' natural like afro on Richard Pryor  
Show me somethin' natural like ass with some stretch  
marks

As African-American writer Sesali Bowen wrote for *Refinery29*,

Kendrick is cute, but my self-worth is not contingent on whether or not he (or anyone else) would fuck me on my mom's couch ... The unfortunate truth is that fitting into hetero-normative beauty standards is a very real commodity for women. There are social benefits and privileges that come with being considered beautiful under a male gaze. Instead of challenging that system of value, Lamar is prioritizing his preferences in it (2017).

Despite these criticisms, Lamar won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for *DAMN.*, the first musical album to win outside of the jazz or classical genres. Recognising *DAMN.* with a Pulitzer has little to do with its social importance or musical qualities, functioning instead as a way for mainstream institutions to pretend hegemony supports African American music and Black politics. As the critic Kyle Gann stated in 1991, 'The Pulitzer has become a Reward for Conformity and a Compensation Prize for Ineffectuality. But it gives the public the idea that the winners represent the best modern music, and an excuse to conclude that American music sucks' (2006: 122). The unfortunate reality of a state-instituted culture industry is that for an artist to achieve such great heights, the state must endorse their media. Although *TPAB* catapulted Lamar's reach and success, it was due largely to its circumvention of the American state. However, as the methods of censorship and criticism used to control practices of cultural resistance are slowly eroded, incorporation has become an increasingly sophisticated tool to enforce boundaries upon what can and cannot be said. Rather than simply commodifying the cultural products of artists – turning songs into recordings to be sold on CDs, an artist's image into posters and figurines, live performances into exclusive DVDs – practices of incorporation have begun to commodify artists identities altogether.

## Conclusion

Political movements are rarely started by politicians alone. They spark cultural movements, produce cultural artifacts, and are fought by cultural means. Politics often presents itself as a game of aesthetics, and as *TPAB* shows us, resistance culture is a powerful weapon. Through this album, Lamar created a text that spoke directly to Black audiences, pushed Black politics into mainstream discourse, and produced an anthem for a protest

movement that echoed across the globe. Yet a mere two years later, the messages encoded into *DAMN.* radically altered in tone. As Lamar's views shifted in line with neoliberal thought, and his sound became tailored towards a homogenous, mainstream audience, his political voice is undermined and his identity commodified. No longer does Lamar discuss how neoliberal democracies protect whiteness as default and disempower racial minorities; instead he finds solace in religious salvation and personal change.

Some might see Lamar's changing political beliefs as nothing more than a symptom of his ambition or religious beliefs. They very well might be. However, they are also a symptom of operating within a music industry built for a specific kind of audience. While *DAMN.* afforded him a larger audience, Lamar has failed to address his newfound fans in a way that is politically meaningful, allowing for them to misread his previous message of Black liberation. For his ambitions of braggadocious financial success to be realised, Lamar must be able to cater to white audiences and voice messages about African American communities that do not pose a radical threat to the status quo. By depoliticising his art, Lamar allows white liberals to engage in his music without a critical examination of its socio-political context, including the racial formation of neoliberal democracies themselves. His work on *TPAB* may have thrust Black liberation politics into the public spotlight, but *DAMN.*'s message has overshadowed it. The critical reception *DAMN.* received from white institutions like the Pulitzer Prize has only served to cement its place as a 'superior' album and affirm his voice as non-radical.

Black cultural practices like blues and jazz have historically been adopted, institutionalised, and appropriated by white artists. This may just be the beginning of the end for hip-hop. As capitalism consumes another genre of music, it also consumes another Black identity. It consumes the diversity of racial representation people of colour call for, reducing it to the highly packaged and regulated commodity Cornel West warned us of. I believe it is important that further research is undertaken to examine methods of reclaiming resistance from incorporation, and the nuance marginalised artists can utilise within a system that seeks to destroy them. If we are to truly gain freedom from the capitalist machine that controls our cultural practices, our identities, and our hopes for sustainable life on this planet, we cannot allow artists like Lamar to be 'cancelled' and discarded. Artists and celebrities do not exist outside of such socio-political discourse and should be included in conversations of aesthetics, culture and politics.

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### End Notes

1. I use uppercase B Black as opposed to lowercase b black to make an ideological distinction between political agency and skin colour. While black denotes a racial category that reduces a person to the colour of their skin, Black represents a framework of Black liberation politics that is not necessarily exclusive to African Americans.
2. The Fox News broadcast in question was a live broadcast that could not be found in a more reliable location. The source quoted (Unruly 2015) is a YouTube video of the broadcast on TV, filmed by a member of the public. See filmography for source.

### Mumbai Shuffle

In a famous Mumbai slum, Kevin McCloud  
gravely ponders a million souls in a square mile  
producing millions' worth of goods  
apparently from nothing

women in doorways lean in towards each other  
not everyone smiles at Kevin, or, beyond him, at us  
in our odourless dwellings, with no more rats than we can handle  
toilets to shit in rather than the open drains their kids dangle over

on a hot night in Adelaide  
one dead rat is making its olfactory mark nearby  
a lone cockroach crosses the floor  
it's the season when the eye catches sideways scuttles

the lizard brain hisses "arachnid"  
before the front elaborates: 'hunterman'

I may be alone in all this space  
but absent family clusters round

we slept five to a room when small  
sharp edges ground down by proximity, rubbing along

in the slum, the streets are safe at night  
at parties, ten or more pairs of hands touch your food  
before your plate reaches you

the schoolgirls leaving these warrens each new day  
are crisp as banknotes  
clean as whistles  
which do not follow their shining progress

Cath Kenneally

# Resisting the Guru Mentality: An Essay on Pedagogies Towards Personal Empowerment in Actor Training

Jo Loth

*This essay reflects on the pedagogies of acting coach Howard Fine and voice teacher Kristin Linklater as alternatives to guru-style actor training. I define a guru as a teacher who assumes an 'all knowing' status in the classroom and is revered by students as the source of all wisdom. In opposition to the guru approach, Social Constructivism situates learning as a dynamic, relational activity, developed through reflective thinking. With a specific focus on the use of prompt questions to invite reflective thinking, this essay shares the author's experiences of the way Fine and Linklater's pedagogies support students' self-efficacy. The essay concludes with reflections on the seductive nature of the guru approach, and the value in resisting this seduction in order to empower ourselves to reach our potential.*

KEY WORDS: Actor training, Social Constructivism, Growth Mindset, Howard Fine, Kristin Linklater

If you know someone who is talking about their class and the teacher as a deity, there's something really unhealthy about that... Good training should teach and help you develop the tools to do the work on your own (Fine 2009: 180-2).

In soliciting feedback from my students, I try to teach a way of learning that recognizes and tackles a persistent tendency many of us have to be self-denigrating, self-judging, and ultimately more ready to fail than to succeed (Linklater 2006: 62).

This essay reflects on the pedagogies of acting coach Howard Fine and voice teacher Kristin Linklater as alternatives to guru-style actor training. I define a guru as a teacher who assumes an 'all knowing' status in the classroom and is revered by students as the source of all wisdom. As a student in Linklater and Fine's approaches, I came to realise ways in which my own thought processes still clung to aspects of the guru approach. I observed my own desire to please the teacher and for the teacher to tell me if I was 'right' or 'wrong'. I noted my longing for the teacher to lay out what the next steps should be for my own development.

In opposition to the guru approach, Social Constructivism (Vgotsky 1978; Dewey 1910) situates learning as a dynamic, relational and developed through reflective thinking. Vgotsky describes relations between people as an essential part of a child's learning process, commenting that:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*)... All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals (Vgotsky 1978: 57).

For Dewey, reflective thinking is the basis of intellectual activity:

The most important factor in the training of good mental habits consists in acquiring the attitude of suspended conclusion, and in mastering the various methods of searching for *new* materials to corroborate or to refute the first suggestions that occur. To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry – these are the essentials of thinking (Dewey 1910:13).

Dewey also advocates that 'enquiry and the capacity for growth are embedded in the situations and activities that create educational experience' (Heilbronn et al. 2018: 9).

In my experience, Social Constructivist pedagogy can be enhanced through incorporating Dweck's concept of a growth mindset in which students take responsibility for their learning and develop their own strategies for personal success (Dweck 2006: 59). With a growth mindset, an individual views intelligence and ability as

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qualities 'they can develop' as opposed to a fixed mindset in which these aspects 'are believed to be a fixed trait' (Dweck 2006: 57).

I have studied with Howard Fine in a four-day public-facing Masterclass in Sydney in 2016 and have since audited Fine's Melbourne Masterclass in 2018, and online masterclasses and lectures via Zoom in 2020. Having been familiar with the Linklater approach to voice since 2005, I began to engage in serious study of the approach in 2016 with Brisbane teacher Rob Pensalfini and in 2018 learnt from Linklater herself in a two-week workshop at the Kristin Linklater Voice Centre (Scotland). I now incorporate Fine and Linklater's pedagogical approaches into my teaching at The University of the Sunshine Coast. It is important to note that this essay did not arise from a planned research project but is a reflection on my own professional development activities. For this reason, I will focus on Fine and Linklater's pedagogical processes as documented in publicly available information.

This essay will discuss my experiences of Fine and Linklater's approaches in relation to Social Constructivism and a Growth Mindset. I will conclude with reflections on the seductive nature of the guru approach, and the value in resisting this seduction in order to empower ourselves to reach our potential.

### **Howard Fine: Tools of the craft**

Fine's pedagogy can be described as a distilled adaptation of Uta Hagen's methodology, which can be traced back to Stanislavski's legacy in the USA (Hagen 2008). Fine has established acting schools in Los Angeles and Melbourne Australia and his website includes an impressive list of movie stars he has coached (HowardFine.com 2020). Fine's book *Fine on Acting: A Vision of the Craft* (2009) includes his 'Eight Steps to Role Preparation and Script Analysis' (187–200), a step-by-step approach to developing a realistic character. Fine advocates that actors use these preparatory steps in order to be fully spontaneous in each performance in order 'to be a human being living in the given circumstance of the script, not an actor trying to do the scene right' (Fine 2009: 104). A lengthy chapter in his book describes common mistakes made by actors and identifies ways to address these errors (Fine 2009: 89–128). For example, when an actor makes the mistake of 'playing an idea' or 'concept' of a character, Fine states that this can be addressed by 'finding authentic connections to a role' (Fine 2009: 95–96). After reading *Fine on Acting* I tried out this vocabulary in my classes and noted it was an effective, shorthand way to provide feedback towards tangible results. Previously when observing a student make the mistake of 'playing an idea' I would consider that the student was playing the role

in a very one-dimensional way. I realised that to tell the student their performance was one dimensional would not be helpful or supportive, so I would then spend quite a bit of time trying to talk around the problem and create workshop exercises to provide this feedback. In contrast, Fine's terminology of this mistake reframes the situation in a positive way and offers an immediate solution. Fine emphasises that these mistakes can happen at every level of skill development and experience, for, in his words, 'there are no advanced mistakes, only mistakes of fundamentals' (theStream.tv 2012). In Fine's 2016 Masterclass (Howard Fine Acting Studio, Australia 2016) there was a vast array of student experience and expertise: from novices through to actors who had worked in high-profile Australian television series. In watching other students' scenes, I observed the way Fine's principles applied across all levels of ability and experience.

### **Kristin Linklater: Connecting to a personal voice**

Kristin Linklater, who passed away in June 2020 at the age of 84, was a renowned voice teacher, most famous for her approach to vocal freedom as espoused in her book *Freeing the Natural Voice* (2006). This approach is based on the teaching of Iris Warren at LAMDA (London) in the 1950s; and Linklater shared, refined and developed this approach through teaching at Tisch School of the Arts, New York, the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, Emerson College and Columbia University (Mills 2020). Linklater's approach to teaching Shakespearean performance is documented in her book *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice* (2012). Linklater's work is based on the premise that 'tensions acquired through living in this world... often diminish the efficiency of the natural voice' and aims to remove 'the blocks that inhibit the human instrument' (Linklater 2006: 7). The Linklater vocal progression, a method for teaching and warming up the voice, begins with physical awareness and awareness of breath then moves through phonation described as 'freeing vibrations' (Linklater 2006: 87). The next step is to release tension in the channel (the jaw, tongue and soft palate) followed by the development of resonance, breath capacity, range and articulation. A major point of difference between the Linklater approach and other vocal techniques is the instruction to focus attention away from the sound of the voice towards imaginative visualisations and the way the voice feels in the body or, in Linklater's words, to 'shift the job of judging sound from the aural sense to the tactile and visual sense' (Linklater 2006: 65). The first two steps of the progression – physical awareness and breath awareness – support this shift. In other approaches these aspects could be described as 'postural alignment' and 'breath support', terms that can be associated with having 'correct posture' and strengthening the muscles that support breath work. Instead Linklater's terms ('physical awareness' and 'awareness of breath') shift

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the focus towards observation of a personal, embodied experience. This focus on individual experience is maintained in Linklater's approach to Shakespearean text in her comments that:

It is the actor's own raw material that makes a character believable. Out of the actor/person's own emotions, intellect, memories, imagination, tragedies, loves, hates, family history, dreams, soul, voice and body a "character" is forged who is a believable inhabitant of what-ever world occupies the stage (Linklater 2012: 3).

In these ways, Linklater's pedagogy assists students, firstly, to tune into their instincts, then trust and develop them in the service of expressive, personalised performances.

### **Interlude: Prompt questions for reflective thinking**

Reflective thinking is a central part of the Fine and Linklater's approaches. Fine states that 'before I critique any scene, I ask the actors three things: *What worked? What didn't? And Why?*' (2009: 181). Throughout workshops, as documented in *Freeing the Natural Voice*, Linklater asks students to reflect on their experiences by sharing something that is 'fresh, new or interesting... [because] any new experience must be acknowledged if it is to become an agent of conscious change' (Linklater 2006: 62). Dewey (1910: 13) observes that reflective thinking can be uncomfortable because 'it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance...[while] judgement [is] suspended during further inquiry; and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful'. The next sections will explore my experiences of discomfort in considering Fine and Linklater's prompt questions.

### **What worked? What didn't? And why?**

This was Fine's question to me and my scene partner after we had performed a scene from *My Thing of Love* (Gersten 1996) in his public facing Sydney Masterclass (Howard Fine Acting Studio, Australia, 2016). Our comic scene had been received by hoots of laughter and warm applause from the audience and I was on a post-performance adrenaline high. By all accounts we had performed 'successfully', but I couldn't articulate the reasons the scene had gone well, and I also had no thoughts on how to work to further develop the scene. I remember giving a vague response that I felt 'connected' to the character. But, overall, I felt at a loss. Fine's constructive feedback for me was to further explore my character's psychological obstacles (as per Step 7 in his book). Specifically, this meant to delve into my character's vulnerability as an alcoholic who is meeting

her husband's mistress (yes, it is actually a comic play). To do this, I later worked through some writing and self-improvisation activities. During that first day of the Masterclass, I had the opportunity to watch many other students' scenes and became familiar with the process of students engaging in self-reflection within the framework of Fine's '8 steps' and 'Common Mistakes'. On the second day we performed the scene and I vividly remember my responses to Fine's prompt questions. I took my time and shared 'I felt more present today in the scene... yesterday it felt like a blur' and then I stopped for a moment to reflect. It was in that moment I had the insight and was able to share 'I think I was playing the obstacle'. Howard warmly replied, 'Very good!' (Howard Fine Acting Studio, 2016). I had identified that I was 'playing the problem' (one of Fine's common mistakes) by focussing only on my psychological obstacle in the scene, and thus could address this by remembering to work towards the character's objective (see Fine 2009: 111-113). Fine's terms had given me a language with which to analyse my experience and identify how I could improve. As Fine relates 'I am there as a colleague, to give you as many tools as I can. That is what good training is. It puts the student in the driver's seat' (Fine 2009: 182). This process helped me value the process of development and realise that sometimes an actor's mistake can be an important part of the process. In the first time through the scene my portrayal lacked vulnerability and in finding this vulnerability I then needed to remember to bring back my quest for my character's objective. My scene partner and I had previously performed what I would describe as a 'good' performance of the scene. The audience had enjoyed it and we had received positive verbal feedback afterwards. The second time, as we were both integrating feedback, the scene felt 'clunkier', but I could feel within myself that we were both growing and developing as actors and the scene was developing in complexity. My working process was starting to embody reflective practice and a growth mindset.

### **What was fresh, new or interesting?**

This seemingly simple question can be surprisingly challenging to answer. In 2018 at the Kristin Linklater Voice Centre (Scotland), I took some time to consider this question after an activity exploring breath capacity. My initial thoughts were: 'I need more breath'; 'I need to work at getting better at this exercise'; and 'This can be an area of development for me'. These kind of reflections had been desired responses within my previous vocal training experiences. Previously in sharing these kind of responses, I would be being a 'good student', identifying areas to work on and then the teacher would guide me in the process of developing my skills. However, these kind of responses do not answer the question 'What was fresh, new or interesting?'. Linklater notes that to answer

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her question requires an individual to 'develop an ability to perceive habits and register new experiences' and that this ability 'must eventually be refined to extreme subtlety in order to observe the minutiae of neuromuscular behaviour that serve the need to communicate' (Linklater 2006: 31). This refinement of embodied awareness and new experiences, brings a students' focus in the present moment and develops an awareness that we are all constantly in development. In Vgotsky's terms, Linklater's approach 'dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity' with a focus on 'situated negotiations and renegotiation of meaning' (Lave and Wenger 2003: 146).

In Linklater's 2018 workshop, I had worked on Hermione's speech from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (3. 2. 96-121). Following Linklater's process, I was challenged to find my own personal connections with this character to draw from the 'raw material' of my 'own emotions, intellect, memories, imagination' (Linklater 2012: 3). In reflecting on this experience a few months later, I noted in my journal:

When first working on this monologue I think I had a rather limited version of who 'Hermione' is. Then I really started to consider Hermione's relationship with her husband in relation to my own experiences in my marriage – the teasing, bitterness, love, bitterness, pain – and it's huge! There was so much more to draw on. The more I re-read the play the more I found inside myself that I could bring to this character. In Howard Fine's terms I was previously 'playing an idea' of the character which, of course, will result in one dimensional performance. My challenge was not only to find the character inside myself – as Howard Fine recommends – but to actually find how I am much bigger than any idea of myself (Personal Journal, 10 February 2019).

In this journal entry, I was not only connecting Linklater and Fine's concepts, I was also gaining an increased perception of my own identity. Through regularly engaging in Linklater's vocal techniques and paying attention to new experiences I was allowing my perception of myself to transform and develop. This led me to further reflect that:

In many ways we 'play an idea' of ourselves in our habitual lives, and this idea of ourselves is physicalised in tensions throughout our body that keep us in this limited view of ourselves. I'm currently working on releasing my jaw and this is a massively complex process. I'm realising how my jaw has been 'moderating' the air that comes in and leaves my body. I feel that this is a result of being trained in the idea that expressing emotions makes a

woman 'hysterical' and if you are hysterical then you will not be taken seriously. As a result of this, I had been controlling the way I express myself – and this has been held back in my jaw. Also – my jaw has been working overtime to replace the energy of the original impulse of what I want to say with what I should be 'presenting'. I've realised that my voice has previously been forced out of my body with effortful energy from my jaw, rather than trusting my own instincts (Personal Journal, 10 February 2019).

Here my reflection on my own jaw tension demonstrates a developing awareness of 'the minutiae of neuromuscular behaviour that serve the need to communicate' (Linklater 2006: 31). For me, this journal extract crystallises the way that Fine and Linklater's approaches have supported me to trust my personal insights and instincts.

In internalising and personalising Fine and Linklater's reflective techniques I have started to embody Vgotsky's maxim that 'understanding and experience are in constant interaction' (Lave and Wenger 2003: 146). These processes have strengthened my growth mindset and ability, in Dweck's words, to 'remain in charge' of my own learning (2006: 81).

## Conclusion

This essay has shared ways that Fine and Linklater's pedagogies have supported me to develop a practice that is uniquely my own. In Dewey's terms, their approaches form 'a humanistic curriculum' to actively support the development of 'distinctive perspectives' (Heilbronn et al. 2018: 6, 14).

I find it fascinating that having espoused concepts of Social Constructivism since the beginning of my teaching career, I still reverted to wanting a teacher as 'guru' when engaging in professional development activities. On the first day of Fine's Masterclass I felt at a loss to reflect on my own performance, and when working with Linklater I was initially flummoxed by the process of identifying 'fresh, new or interesting' experiences.

I have also observed that the guru approach to teaching is still utilised and even celebrated throughout the arts. Why is this so? Perhaps there is a sense that artistic virtuosity and excellence requires subservience? Perhaps there is something about the status of the elite teacher-artist that pervades our consciousness? I have a theory that the guru sensibility has survived because it offers security and stability: a teacher's confidence can be boosted when students respect their ultimate authority; and for the vulnerable novice, a guru teacher gives them a sense they will be taken care of within a precarious industry. I now believe that as students when

we are focussed on 'getting something right' we minimise our potential because we are trying to fit ourselves into ideas that already exist. This sense of security and stability is ultimately unhelpful because great artists are those who realise their individual personal potential.

By exploring Fine and Linklater's pedagogies I have experienced both the challenges and value of a student-empowering approach. For the teacher, this approach requires the humility to share techniques towards students' self-efficacy. It requires the courage to challenge students to sit in the discomfort of reflective practice. For the student it requires the courage to take charge of their learning and build a unique, personal practice. In unravelling my own predisposition to the guru approach, I have developed greater empathy for my students as I work to support their self-efficacy.

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### Bird Man

I was a boy of ten  
staying in the country  
with my auntie and cousins  
for the summer school holidays

we were going crabbing  
and shot half a dozen galahs  
with a .22 rifle  
to use as bait

as my auntie stacked them  
in the freezer  
wrapped in plastic she cautioned me:  
you better not tell your father

twelve years ago  
my auntie died of breast cancer

on the anniversary  
of her death  
I sit in the coronary care unit  
in a darkened room  
listening to my father  
gasp for breath

galahs stacked in rows  
in the freezer of my mind.

**STEVE BROCK**

# A Critique of the Western Sociological Tradition Using the Japanangka Paradigm

MARTEN KOOMEN

*This article critiques the Western sociological tradition using the Indigenous Australian Japanangka paradigm elaborated by Errol West as a reference. The critique centres on a three-world pattern persistent in the Western tradition. Western expressions of the pattern are compared to that from a distinct Indigenous Australian standpoint expressed through the Japanangka paradigm. The comparison reveals the Western tradition having a problematic and tenuous connection to the physical and sacred.*

*The critique builds on the method of rational reconstruction in conjunction with exploration of patterns. The method focuses on reconstructing pre-theoretical knowledge that is expressed as simply as possible and which has universal application. Rational reconstruction and its criteria emerge from the Western tradition and the method reveals it to be in deficit compared to the Japanangka paradigm which provides a better universal expression of the three-world pattern.*

*Rational reconstruction requires reference to clear examples against which pre-theoretical knowledge can be evaluated. To this end, the critique and analysis refer to the contemporary Uluru Statement from the Heart as well as acts of genocide such as the dispersal of Indigenous people from Coranderrk.*

KEY WORDS: Japanangka, Habermas, Bourdieu, Coranderrk, Uluru Statement.

## Introduction

This article critiques the Western sociological tradition using the Indigenous Australian Japanangka paradigm as an external point of reference (West 2000; Foley 2003). The critique is framed around a comparison of a three-world pattern evident in both traditions (Koomen 2020: 487-8). Furthermore, this article makes the case that the Japanangka paradigm provides the better universal paradigm for use across different traditions.

The three-world pattern persists in the Western tradition with Christianity expressing the pattern in terms of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; Immanuel Kant expresses the pattern through three critiques of Pure reason, Practical reason, and Judgement; and Jean-François Lyotard refers to the pattern through the terms Truth, Justice, and Beauty (Kant 2016, 2004, 2005; Lyotard 1984: 44). For this critique, the three-world patterns of Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu provide the entry point into other authors in the Western tradition. Habermas frames the objective, social and subjective worlds, and Bourdieu describes economic,

social, and cultural capital. These are considered here as typical framings within contemporary Western thought (Habermas 1985; Bourdieu 1986).

The Japanangka paradigm emerges from a distinct Indigenous Australian tradition and is described by Dennis Foley as having three interacting worlds; the Physical, the Human, and the Sacred (Foley 2003; West 2000). The Japanangka paradigm resembles patterns found in the Western tradition but has a distinct Indigenous Australian standpoint that explicitly references the physical and sacred. The Japanangka paradigm, along with the expressions of Habermas and Bourdieu, are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - The framings of Japanangka Errol West, Jürgen Habermas, and Pierre Bourdieu respectively



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The Western tradition has an unclear relationship with the physical and sacred which are explicitly referred to in the Japanangka paradigm. Western thought emerges from a tradition that worships sky gods such as Zeus in Greek mythology and Christianity's Father in Heaven. This theme prevails in Western sociological thought including Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' of capitalism which is critiqued by Karl Marx through the notion of a political and economic superstructure that governs relationships among 'men' (sic). The heaven-and-earth pattern is found in Habermas's elaboration of system-and-lifeworld and in Anthony Giddens's elaboration of structure-and-agency. Therefore, either with or without reference to a deity, the Western tradition tends to approach the physical world through transcendental concepts and symbols (Smith 1993: 292; Marx 2000: 425; Habermas 1992; Giddens 2014: 5-28).

Japanangka Errol West describes Indigenous Australian ontology as enmeshing the spiritual and material. This contrasts with the polarised Western tradition in which one extreme worships the three worlds as a whole, such as Christian worship of the Holy Trinity, while others in the Western atheist tradition shun the sacred altogether (Dawkins 2016). Where the Western tradition is polarised between worship of the Holy Trinity and atheism, the Japanangka paradigm has a Sacred World that allows for a greater plurality of personal and group Dreaming along with attitudes towards the sacred (Andrews 2018: 1-15; West 2000: 237; Foley 2003: 47).

This article employs the method of rational reconstruction in conjunction with a focus on patterns. The method of rational reconstruction emerges from the Western tradition and is used by Habermas to describe what is important at a pre-theoretical level of human understanding (Koomen 2020; Habermas 1979: 12-4; Carnap 1962: 3; Wunderlich 1979: 169-72). Identification of patterns is used here in a similar fashion to the fields of architecture and software engineering where it is used to communicate ideas that repeatedly present but never the same way twice (Alexander et al. 1977: x; Gamma et al. 1995: 2). A focus on patterns is distinct from a focus on progress narratives emerging from historical materialism first elaborated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and subsequently reconstructed by Habermas (Marx and Engels [1846]2000; Habermas 1979).

The argument that the Japanangka paradigm provides the better sociological framing emerges from the method of rational reconstruction. Rational reconstruction seeks to replace vague human intuitions with exact statements to build universal theories. The method requires ideas to be expressed as simply as possible and to be universally applicable. It is argued here that the Japanangka paradigm is the most parsimonious expression of the

three-world pattern and expressed in a way that allows other expressions to be described and theoretically explored. The Japanangka paradigm is considered here to provide the better expression from the perspective of the Western tradition.

While this article makes the argument that the Japanangka paradigm provides the better universal expression of the three-world pattern, this effort is secondary to that of articulating interconnectedness across perspectives. There is a greater focus on exposition than on argument through a sensibility of Indigenous *métissage* that purposefully juxtaposes historical perspectives to reframe and enhance historical understanding (Donald 2009: 5). It touches on colonisation and maintains a stance that decolonisation involves Indigenous people gaining control of their land and life. Decolonisation is not taken as a metaphor for other ills of society (Tuck and Yang 2012: 162). Nevertheless, the focus here is on deficiencies in the Western tradition.

### **Inherent Tensions: The physical, human, and sacred**

#### *The physical world*

Jürgen Habermas frames an abstract objective world that is here considered to correspond to the Physical World in the Japanangka paradigm. In Habermas's abstraction, an explicit connection to the physical world is lost. Where the Japanangka paradigm addresses resistance associated with the Physical World, Habermas explores resistance through a tension between *facticity* and validity (Foley 2003: 49; Habermas 1998). Facticity is a concept developed by Martin Heidegger to describe factual matter existing in a worldly sense but not necessarily in the inanimate existence of nature (Heidegger 1996: 52). Habermas' abstraction conflates the Japanangka paradigm's Physical World with its Human World. It is in the human social world where language is used to create constructs described by Heidegger as facticity (Austin 1975).

Habermas strongly rebukes Heidegger whilst simultaneously building a theory upon his concept of facticity. Heidegger provokes a personal rebuke through a failure to explicitly renounce Nazism and his membership of the Nazi Party. A philosophical rebuke responds to Heidegger's focus on *being (Dasein)* as a presence in time and history detached from the actions of the physical empirical person (Habermas 1990: 155-6). While distancing himself from Heidegger, Habermas nevertheless builds on his concept of facticity that is itself detached from the empirical world (Sluga 1993).

The tension between Heidegger and Habermas is of interest to postcolonial theory because it illustrates a

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fissure in the Western tradition directly relating to the genocidal tendency of Nazism. This fissure is reflected upon later with reference to the colonisation of Australia. While Habermas makes great effort to avoid Heidegger's trajectory towards Nazism, there is nevertheless a gap in Habermas' own work explored throughout this article.

Pierre Bourdieu elaborates economic capital as a commodity able to be institutionalised through property rights making explicit a fundamental distinction between Indigenous Australian and Western thought (Bourdieu 1986: 47). Dennis Foley describes Indigenous Australian philosophy based on the belief that *people do not own the land and instead the land owns people* (Foley 2003: 46). Bourdieu's economic capital provides a direct contrast by characterising *land as owned by people* through property rights, titles, and mortgages.

Habermas and Bourdieu both conflate the physical with human constructs to privilege the latter. This turn towards the social world is reflected in other lines of inquiry in the Western tradition such as the *hermeneutic turn* and *linguistic turn* that privilege human understanding and language over the physical world itself (Lafont 1999). Karen Barad challenges this by turning towards the physical and material in a relatively recent line of inquiry referred to as posthumanism (Barad 2003). However, the Japanangka paradigm opens the possibility for a more direct return to the physical rather than an esoteric turn towards it.

The Japanangka paradigm provides a direct connection to land highlighting a fundamental distinction between Indigenous Australian philosophy and the Western tradition. However, all framings describe the three-worlds existing simultaneously and in connection with each other. In this way, the objective world of Habermas and the economic capital elaborated by Bourdieu can be expressed through the Japanangka paradigm as particular symbolic social constructions of the Physical World emerging from the Human World.

#### *The sacred world*

The sacred is problematic for the Western tradition. This is evident in the work of Habermas who, after Max Weber, frames the sacred within a progress narrative where religion disintegrates as a unifying force from which the autonomous spheres of science, morality and art emerge (Habermas 1992; Weber 2009; Harrington 2000). Where the Japanangka paradigm explicitly references the sacred, the Western tradition actively works towards excluding religion and its correlation to the sacred.

Bourdieu's cultural capital has a closer relationship to the Sacred World of the Japanangka paradigm. This

is illustrated in the work of a number of Indigenous Australian thinkers and artists who draw on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to explore individual difference and identity (Bamblett et al. 2019; Bourdieu 1984). It is through aesthetics and art, which include painting, dance, music, and ritual practice, that Bourdieu's cultural capital bears a relationship to the Sacred World of the Japanangka paradigm.

The Western tradition's uncertain relationship with art and the aesthetic can be traced to Plato who banished artists from the *Republic* only to praise art and beauty in the *Phaedrus*. Similarly, Hegel held that art was obsolete and having no future, only to devote much space and effort to exploring it (Beiser 2005: 23). Habermas emerges from this tradition to postulate a subjective world that is made manifest through aesthetic expressive rationality and art. However, Nikolas Kompridis, a student of Habermas, describes Habermas's work on art and the subjective world as 'nothing more than a stab in the dark' (Kompridis 2006: 108).

Andy Warhol and Herbert Marcuse further illustrate the Western tradition's uncertain relationship with art. Warhol equates art with business in a way that renders it almost indistinct from economic capital (Warhol 1975). Marcuse characterises art as containing the rationality of negation and 'the protest against that which is' (Marcuse 1968: 66). The Western tradition's escape from sacredness and the physical world through art contrasts with the Sacred World of the Japanangka paradigm that explicitly seeks to mesh the spiritual with the material world through sacred practice (West 2000: 237; Foley 2003: 40). The work of Warhol and Marcuse illustrate that the Western tradition often does not consider art and the aesthetic a sacred or cultural practice (Eagleton 2014). In the case of Warhol art becomes a form of economic capital; in the case of Marcuse art is a way to escape the physical and social world.

The Japanangka paradigm's Sacred World is reflected in Émile Durkheim's work that explores Indigenous Australian culture. Durkheim identified religion as a persistent aspect of humanity and a means for shaping an intersubjective moral universe to govern how people relate to one another (Durkheim 2001). This sacredness is lost in contemporary Western narratives that characterise religion as disintegrating or actively dismissed through atheism (Habermas 1992; Dawkins 2016). The loss of sacredness is associated with a loss of perspective over what is collectively known, and what is not. The Western tradition replaces the sacred with a belief that an objective progress narrative in science will ultimately reveal and explain the world. This contrasts with Indigenous Australian philosophy that has a comfortable awareness

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of the limits of its knowledge, which Munya Andrews associates with a sacred respect for things greater than the Human World (Andrews 2018: 2; West 2000: 237; Foley 2003: 47).

Munya Andrews explains Indigenous Australian Dreamtime using Western ideas of God as unknowable, beyond words, and beyond understanding. Dreamtime is likened by Andrews to computer software that provides a worldview through a cultural coding of language and symbols that describes philosophy, cosmology, and relationships among people. This cultural software is described by Andrews as not being singular or homogenous among Australia's numerous Indigenous Nations, and that it instead varies across Indigenous Australian Nations. This illustrates an inherent pluralistic attitude towards worldviews that contrasts with the monotheistic Western traditions (Andrews 2018: 2).

The Dreamtime and Dreaming in the Indigenous Australian tradition can be juxtaposed to the Western tradition that encounters persistent issues around plurality of national and individual identity. Munya Andrews distinguishes Dreamtime as expressing foundational worldviews along with Dreaming that can express personal and group identity. The plurality of Dreamtime and Dreaming among Indigenous Australian nations shows how a plurality of worldviews and personal identity can be accommodated. Andrews conveys a sense of equanimity towards plurality in a way that contrasts with ongoing irreconcilable ideological contests over worldviews and identity in the Western tradition (Andrews 2018; Eagleton 2014).

The sacredness of Dreamtime as well as group and personal Dreaming provide a model that might be used in the Western tradition to address its problematic relationship with plurality. At a national level, the Sacred World of the Japanangka paradigm provides a framing for a plurality of worldviews, religions, and culture. At a personal level, the paradigm provides for a plurality of race, gender, sexuality. These matters are not readily addressed in the Western tradition (Meehan 1995; Abelow et al. 1993; Eagleton 2014).

#### *The human world*

The Human World of the Japanangka paradigm at first sight harmonises well with Habermas's social world. It is however the most problematic for the Western tradition as the human world provides the sphere for addressing conflicting approaches to the physical and sacred.

Sentiments in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* agreed to by numerous Australian First Nation representatives reflect a sensibility also found in Habermas's work. The

Uluru statement is action oriented, and emphasises voice. The statement calls for the voice of First Nation people to be heard in an orderly process of agreement-making about the future, as well as truth-telling about the past (Mayor 2019). These sentiments can all be reasoned about through Habermas's work.

Like the Uluru statement, Habermas values intersubjective consensus and truth in a fashion that ensures all those affected by a consensus are in a position to accept it and its consequences (Habermas 1996). Both the Uluru statement and Habermas value voice and speech in the process of developing consensus, with Habermas stipulating four important presuppositions for a valid consensus: that no one capable of making a contribution is excluded from speaking; that all participants have equal rights to speak; that participants mean what they say; and that speech is not affected by coercion (Habermas 2008: 50).

Where the Uluru statement focuses on the heart, Habermas uses perceptions and feelings as the basis for personal world-disclosure. It is through intersubjectively redeeming the validity of an individual's stream of perceptions and a web moral feeling that Habermas conceptualises consensus (Habermas 1996). However, an issue emerges in Habermas's work as it explicitly links a *perceptible reality* with a species-wide *symbolically prestructured reality* through which consensus is negotiated (McCarthy 1979: xx; Habermas 1979: 10). In contrast to Habermas's species-wide symbolically prestructured reality, Munya Andrews describes a plurality of Dreamtime narratives among Indigenous Australian clans where each Dreamtime has its own signals and symbols that are not able to be meaningfully mixed with other Dreamtimes (Andrews 2018).

The universal symbolically prestructured reality that underpins Habermas's thought emerges from a Western tradition of *a priori* transcendentalism evident in Plato's *Forms* and Kant's *Categories* (Plato 1963; Kant 2016). Habermas argues that his work represents a weaker form of transcendentalism than those that came before (Habermas 1979: 21). Nevertheless, Habermas's symbolically prestructured reality is presented as monolithic and species-wide in a way that does not foster engagement across a plurality of worldviews. A universal symbolically prestructured reality might be considered akin to a universal dreamtime, which is not how Munya Andrews describes Indigenous Australian Dreamtime.

Two questions emerge for Habermas from his postulated symbolically prestructured reality. One asks about inclusiveness, and how a plurality of discordant symbolic realities might be included into a species-wide symbolic

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reality. A second asks how understanding across a plurality of worldviews are meaningfully traversed in a context where Munya Andrews describes different Dreamtimes as not able to be meaningfully mixed. Both questions reveal a gap in Habermas's work.

Where Habermas bases his theory on a linguistically-based cognitive logic, Andrews likens Dreamtime and Dreaming to the work of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell in the Western tradition (Andrews 2018: 6-7). The work of Jung and Campbell address a fluid, vital and a largely unformed unconscious symbolic universe that propels life (Jung 1964; Campbell 1973). Andrews describes a form of symbolic reasoning that is known in the Western tradition particularly through Greek mythology. Greek mythology itself provides a way of framing a distinction between Indigenous Australian Dreamtime and Western mythology. The Indigenous Australian Dreamtime emphasises sacredness of land that a Western perspective might interpret as akin to the ancient Greek's reverence for *Gaia*, *Hades* or *Demeter*; gods associated with the earth and its cornucopia. The Western tradition itself favours sacredness of the sky and heavens leading to the capricious and powerful *Zeus* being the prototypical Western god (Lovelock 2003; Neville 1989; Neville and Dalmau 2008; Graves 1992). While Andrews engages in this form of symbolic reasoning, neither Habermas nor his interlocutors seriously engage with it, other than perhaps Friedrich Nietzsche who explored the energies of Dionysus and Apollo (Nietzsche 2003). In contrast to Dreamtime and Dreaming that frame fluid and unformed unconscious symbols, Habermas's symbolically prestructured reality only encompasses symbols interrogable through cognitive logic.

Habermas acknowledges the limitations of his theory, which is explicated through a hypothetical argument in the cognitive realm with a sceptic. This hypothetical argument is not in the language of engagement (Saurette 2005: 177). Habermas acknowledges that satisfying his conditions for consensus are improbable given that they represent a form of ideal speech, and appeals to the cognitive moral psychology of Kohlberg for a solution. What is notably missing in Habermas's work is reference to the psychology of Jung, Freud and Campbell that addresses parts of the human mind inaccessible to conscious logic (Habermas 1996: 88,185; Kohlberg 1971; Jung 1964; Campbell 1973; Freud 1995). While perhaps sincere in his pursuit of intersubjective understanding, the awkwardness of Habermas's hypothetical argument, and its failure to address the psychology of the unconscious, suggests a gap in his work and the Western tradition more broadly (Habermas 1985).

Within the Western tradition, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida provided a critique of Habermas that has

contemporary currency. Lyotard explicitly eschewed the kind of consensus Habermas works towards because it emerges from language games in the realm of science and cognitive logic (Lyotard 1984: 60-7; Wittgenstein 2009). Lyotard proffered paralogy as an alternative to address a plurality of worldviews, where paralogy is a form of reasoning outside of formal logic (Lyotard and Thébaud 2008). The attraction of paralogy can be demonstrated in fundamental differences across Indigenous and Western traditions on land ownership. The argument that Indigenous people be given land rights so that they can maintain a tradition of not having land rights does not seem a logical and coherent argument. However, there is a case that paralogy is not required to understand this paradox, as it can be readily understood by those with a sincere disposition to understand through ordinary language.

Derrida, like Lyotard, works towards untethering Western logic from its Eurocentric origins and does so in a similar fashion to Heidegger by detaching speech from the empirical person (Derrida 2007; Spivak 2016). Derrida proposes *arche-writing* as a form of writing that precedes speech. Arche-writing, for example, provides a way of extending the symbolically prestructured reality postulated by Habermas by creating new vocabularies (Derrida 2016). Through new vocabularies, and in a similar way to Marcuse's protest against everything through art, Derrida is associated with a subjective sublimity attained by escaping an inheritance of vocabulary and tradition (Rorty 1995: 457). Derrida's work has been used effectively in postcolonial contexts by theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak 2010). However, due to its diminished concern for voice and the empirical person, Derrida's work requires caution in the Australian context where the Uluru statement emphasises the importance of voice in reconciliation.

Trajectories of thought associated with Derrida are sometimes associated with moral relativism, which is an accusation that morality is an expression of culture not tethered to any fundamental tenets (Sweetman 1999). Concerns over moral relativism emerge in the context of Derrida and Heidegger because each seeks to free language from a fixed origin and transcendental signifiers such as God (Spivak 2016: xvi). In some respects, the Indigenous Australian paradigm affords the kind of plurality sought by Derrida and Heidegger. However, in contrast to both, the explicit reference to the Physical World in the Japanangka paradigm anchors morality to a universal truth found in the Physical World.

Like Derrida and Lyotard, Habermas also anchors truth in the social world and forestalls accusations of relativism by incorporating Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

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Progress in moral development is the central contribution that Habermas makes when reconstructing Marxism's historical materialism that addresses technological progress (Habermas 1979). In doing so, Habermas implicitly links progress in the moral dimension with progress in the technological dimension. This link has the potential to unduly characterise Indigenous Australian culture poorly.

Kohlberg postulates three stages of moral development, with the third postconventional level associated with autonomous moral behaviour based on principles that have validity beyond the group to which an individual identifies. It is the postconventional level of moral development upon which Habermas bases his theory of communication (Kohlberg 1971; Habermas 1996).

A case emerges from a Western perspective that Indigenous Australians, independent of considerations of technological progress, have a higher level of moral development than non-Indigenous Australians. Australian First Nation adults, particularly prior to colonisation and dispossession, speak multiple Indigenous languages of neighbouring nations, with empirical evidence identifying some Indigenous adults speaking up to eight languages (Singer and Harris 2016; Andrews 2018: 5). In contrast, modern Australia remains steadfastly monolingual (Adoniou 2018: 273). There is a preliminary case to be made that Indigenous Australian adults, particularly leaders engaging neighbouring nations, routinely engage in what Kohlberg in the Western tradition describes as postconventional moral thinking.

Evidence of high levels of moral development is found among several contemporary Indigenous writers who, despite addressing grim matters of dispossession, genocide and stolen children, frame their work in empathetic and welcoming terms. Examples include *Learning to Fall in Love With Your Country, Welcome to Country, and Finding the Heart* (Pascoe 2007; Langton et al. 2018; Mayor 2019). This suggests that from the perspective of the Western tradition, Indigenous Australian cultures have high levels of moral development and empathy.

## Discussion

This article has explored the case that the Japanangka paradigm is capable of accommodating Western framings of the three-world pattern and that it provides the better general pretheoretical framing for universal use. There is also a case that the Western tradition could align with the Indigenous Australian tradition through a turn towards the physical and the sacred. However, such a turn requires a non-trivial change in standpoint for those embedded in the Western tradition.

The analysis here reveals a tendency for the Western tradition to appropriate the physical world for social and economic goals using abstracted value symbols such as money and related forms of economic capital. The tension between the physical world and economic goals in the Western tradition is evident in contemporary debates over climate change and environmental policy.

The colonising tendency of managing land through the symbol of money was recognised in the early 1900s by Lenin who described capitalism as the ultimate driver of colonialism and imperialism (Lenin 2010). Lenin has been somewhat vindicated in the contemporary context where global coordination is increasingly through the flow of economic capital.

Globalisation and the global flow of money is often associated with neoliberalism and a form of economics promoted by the Nobel Laureate, Milton Friedman. Friedman described neoliberal economics as largely independent of ethical consideration or normative judgement (Friedman 2008: 146; 2002). A seminal contribution by Karl Popper illustrates how neoliberal economics distances itself from Habermas's tradition through a critique of Plato, Hegel and Marx that advocates against collectivist ideals and in favour of economic coordination with minimal government interference (Popper 2002; Stedman Jones 2012: 33-49; Friedman 2002; Hayek 2007; von Mises 2007). Nevertheless, contemporary neoliberalism is still often associated with the sacred through Pentecostal movements that explicitly connect the sacred with the accumulation of money and economic capital (Jennings 2017; Friedman 2002).

The Western tradition tends to appropriate sacred and cultural practices, including sex and education, for economic purposes. The German sociologist Max Weber described the spirit of capitalism emerging out of the sacred practices of Protestantism (Weber 2011). Marcuse postulated a relationship between sexual repression and capital accumulation (Marcuse 1974). The Nobel Laureate Gary Becker considered cultural capital acquired through education only in terms of its capacity to generate economic capital (Becker 1993; Bourdieu 1986). This demonstrates a propensity within the Western tradition to appropriate for the economic world aspects of life many associate with the sacred.

The sacred nevertheless plays an important part in the process of colonial appropriation of land for economic purposes which can be illustrated through the influence of missionaries. Missionaries played a pivotal role in the dispersal of Indigenous people in the Australian state of Victoria from the Aboriginal reserve of Coranderrk in the late 1890s. While some missionaries were sympathetic to

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the Indigenous cause, the role of the German Moravian missionary Friedrich Hagenauer was influential in the genocide. Hagenauer was influential in forcing Indigenous people to change their cultural practice including wedding practices. Hagenauer was also influential in the establishment of a parliamentary act that allowed the colonial state to forcibly separate Indigenous children from their mothers (Jenz 2010a; 2010b: 125). In this way, Hagenauer's efforts to disrupt Indigenous sacred practice was central to the dispersal of Indigenous Australian people so that land could be appropriated for Western economic goals. The history of Coranderrk illustrates the importance of missionaries and the sacred in colonisation and land dispossession (Barwick 1998).

Hagenauer provides a link to Habermas's tradition and to the genocidal tendency manifest in Martin Heidegger and Nazism described earlier. Hagenauer considered the Indigenous corroboree a form of shocking satanical excitement and an enemy of the soul. Felicity Jenz describes Hagenauer's interpretation emerging from an inability among missionaries 'to see indigenous practices in any way other than through their own spiritual and cultural paradigms' (Jenz 2010b: 125). Hagenauer was not able to accommodate within his own socially structured symbolic reality the perceptible reality presented by the Indigenous corroboree in the physical world.

The distinction between Hagenauer and Indigenous Australian thought is an important one. Hagenauer's attitude is reflected in the work of Heidegger who concluded that *being* 'is not something like a being' (Heidegger 1996: 3). For Heidegger, *being* 'is that which determines beings as beings' (Heidegger 1996: 4). A similar line of thought allowed Hagenauer to assert his own socially constructed subjective sense of *being* to deny Indigenous Australian people their right to being. In contrast, the people of Coranderrk took their sense of *being* as largely self-evident as their physical presence is *like being*. This sensibility is better illustrated in Bruce Pascoe's account of how the Wathaurong people encountered the English convict William Buckley who they found wandering helplessly. The Wathaurong acknowledged Buckley's *being* through a physical familiarity to love him as one of their own. The Wathaurong accounted for Buckley's white skin colour through the sacred world as a returned spirit. Where Heidegger considered *being* a subjective human construct imposed on the physical world, Pascoe's account suggests Indigenous Australian people consider being as a physical semblance that is interpreted. The sacred practices of the Wathaurong people were able to interpret William Buckley as a *being*, and the sacred practices of Hagenauer could not reciprocate that sentiment for the people of Coranderrk with devastating consequences (Pascoe 2007: 14,22; Barwick 1998).

The reified symbolic reality used by Hagenauer to deny Indigenous Australian their humanity raises concerns about Habermas's theory founded upon a similar idea of a symbolically prestructured reality. This is to suggest that Habermas, and the Western tradition more broadly, may not have fully overcome the genocidal tendency inherited from Heidegger. Habermas attempts to make up for a neglect of the sacred in a later series of essays in which he acknowledges that religious traditions 'have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life' (Habermas 2008: 131). However, there is an awkwardness in Habermas's addendum which is an adjunct to his main body of work.

The Western tradition neglects forces that propel human communal life – forces that are here considered part of the sacred. The Western sociological tradition is inordinately focused on the validity of negative laws which are laws that seek to prevent one individual from infringing upon the rights of others. This focus emerges from the Christian tradition and its concern for *doing unto others as you would have them do unto you*, a concern that was philosophically theorised and elaborated by Immanuel Kant into a *categorical imperative*. This interest was further elaborated by Habermas (Habermas 1998; Kant 2002; Bowie 2003). There is a contemporary bifurcation of the modernist tradition often described as *poststructuralism* reflected in the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. Poststructuralism is also concerned about the imposition of laws and norms, but instead of questioning their validity poststructuralism seeks to escape them altogether. However, common to both contemporary modernism and poststructuralism is that each emerge from Heidegger's notion of *being* that is detached from the empirical and physical world to privilege human will in defining *being* (Spivak 2016: xvi; Hargis 2011; Foucault 2002; Karademir 2014; Butler 2007; Sluga 1993; Harcourt 2007; Habermas 1981, 1997). Both modernism and poststructuralism eschew the sacred in a way that contrasts to how Durkheim found the sacred propelling a coherent and stable moral life among Indigenous Australian communities (Durkheim 2001).

Japanangka Errol West observes that while Indigenous Australians are aware of their origins and limits of their knowledge, the Western tradition has a certain capacity to publicly flaunt its knowledge (West 2000: 237; Foley 2003: 47). This flaunting might be explained in a number of ways. The Western tradition has an incompleteness, with an infinite incompleteness in its scientific quest. This incompleteness emerges from the Western tradition postulating a progress narrative which requires constant recalibration of thought. The analysis here also reveals an ongoing tension between the modernist tradition that seeks to impose negative laws fairly and a poststructuralist tradition that seeks to escape impositions

altogether. These debates are not anchored to a physical reality but to a social reality that requires ongoing linguistic output to reproduce. Finally, unlike Indigenous Australian approaches, the loss of religion and the sacred in the Western tradition has resulted in a lost capacity to differentiate: inside knowledge from outside knowledge, the sacred from profane, and the knowledge of youth from those of elders (Andrews 2018: 26-9; Durkheim 2001). The contemporary Western tradition encourages anyone to create and rearrange words and symbols, and to flaunt these creations for appropriation by economic goals (Kress 2003, 2010).

## Conclusion

This critique has observed Western thought as having an inordinate focus on cognitive logic detached from the physical and sacred. In the cognitive realm, Habermas provides the Western tradition with a sophisticated approach towards democracy and inclusion that is reflected in Australian First Nation calls in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. While this suggests the possibility of common ground, the Uluru statement's reference to land and sacredness is problematic for the Western tradition.

The Western tradition's preference for cognitively interrogable arguments emerges from a history of transcendental *a priori* approaches including Plato's Forms, Kant's Categories, and Habermas's symbolically prestructured reality. These transcendental approaches can create barriers for addressing Indigenous claims, particularly those pertaining to the sacred and its fluid symbolic logic. Decolonisation efforts might be enhanced through further understanding different approaches to the sacred and how they pertain to attitudes towards land. Where Indigenous Australian philosophy uses the sacred to build a relationship between humans and the physical, the Western tradition tends to consider the physical only for scientific investigation and economic appropriation.

This article has sought to avoid appropriation or reification of Indigenous paradigms. Nevertheless, there are elements of Indigenous Australian approaches that are considered here to have broader utility. The notions of Dreamtime and Dreaming point to a more universal model for teaching about a plurality of creation narratives as well as providing for a diversity of personal and group identity.

How identity and plurality is addressed has been linked here to issues of *being*. The Indigenous Australian philosophy has been observed as approaching *being* through a physical presence that has personal Dreaming located within a group Dreaming and Dreamtime. In contrast, Heidegger expresses well what is still dominant in the Western tradition that being emerges from *being*

itself, a position found here to be associated with a capricious tendency for genocide.

Japanangka Errol West worked to provide a teaching and research model through a paradigm that focused on the physical, human, and sacred. The discussion here has found that the paradigm is able to frame teaching and research about the Western tradition as well as being fruitful for the Indigenous Australian tradition. When compared to Western expressions, the Japanangka paradigm provides a better teaching and research framework for universal application.

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## Author

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### Mariette Handke talks with her book group friends

Since the heart attack  
I've changed,  
drive slower on the freeway,  
cook proper meals,  
no longer use the microwave.

At our monthly meeting  
it used to be me  
who hadn't read or finished the novel  
we'd chosen to discuss.  
Now I make notes,  
sometimes read a passage out loud.

I telephoned Debra last week.  
She's living in Chico, California,  
with a short order cook named Raymond.  
I down-played my recovery,  
the sessions with the hospital psychiatrist,  
didn't mention my terror at night,  
imagining my father in the fold of the bedroom curtains,  
in his right hand, the punishing belt.

If I've learned anything  
it's to practice gratitude,  
so I try to remind myself I have  
a heartbeat, and a daughter,  
all of Proust, Melville and Dickens to read.

PETER BAKOWSKI & KEN BOLTON

# Permesso?

PAUL WILLIAMS

No one has knocked at the Cavedaschi's door for years. When neighbours call, they simply call out '*permesso?*' (Can I come in?) and enter.

But today someone is knocking loud. With a baton.

Lina's mother calls: get the door, but don't let them in yet...

'*Che?*'

'Delay them. Smile, silly girl.'

Her mother arranges Lina's hair, licks a finger and gives her a cat wash, presses down her dress, slips it off the left shoulder. Lina pulls it up again. Her mother pulls it down.

'Be nice. No wide eyes.' Her mother raps her on the head with her thimble. Kicks her shin. '*Via!*'

That familiar crunch, crunch in her stomach, like when soldiers march down the street or when her father chews apples.

'*Sono venuti per noi, finalmente!*' (They have finally come for us!) her father mutters. He has flattened himself against the kitchen wall. Her mother bangs past him down the steps. 'You two girls tidy up the kitchen while your father trembles in his boots. I'll tidy the cellar.'

The knocking stops. Lina can hear their boots outside on the small stones.

Her father stuffs tobacco into his pipe. Lights it. What a time to smoke, she thinks.

Her mother lunges at the mantelpiece and props up the large photo of Mussolini. Pushes the bric-a-brac aside so the madman with bald head and bulging eyes resumes pride of place in their low-ceilinged living room. They always lay him flat. Can't stand him watching them while they eat.

Lina unlatches the bolt and pulls open the door. Two men block the sunlight. She sees the red armbands on their left sleeves, black swastikas in a white circle, worn like bandages, as if they have broken their elbows. Then the grey furry material of their jackets. The medals, dangling things sewn onto their collars, their pocket lapels, even on their thin khaki ties. Their shirts are so tight around the neck it pinches the skin. Someone did a lot of sewing here. A sparkling shiny belt, another Swastika, this time metal on material, and slash of a brown leather strap around their shoulder and to their waist. Crisply ironed shirts, trousers.

She wants to reach out and feel the material between her fingers. Touch the dazzling medals. Smell the starch, the wet lamb felt of the coats. The neat sewn embroidery of two

lightning strikes on the first man's right collar. Such detail. Even the cotton matches and is sewn in even strokes.

She is supposed to delay them outside, but she forgets and the men push open the green wooden door and duck into the living room kitchen dining room with its uneven stone floors and its closed shutters and its fireplace and its mantelpiece with Mussolini staring into a bright future. *Permesso...* she says for them. *Entratta!*

The room is suddenly dark and the stone floors are suddenly hard and mean, the ceiling lower than usual and the smell of her father's pipe smoke asphyxiating. They are big men, stand tall, and Lina realises that she is hunching her shoulders. Her dress is dirty and dull and her bare feet unwashed and stained with purple.

There is no electricity, and the latrine is a hole in the ground. There is no phone, no cars, no radio in the house. No books either. Her parents are illiterate. They never bath or shower. Lina suddenly knows this, sees it for the first time, through their eyes, as these men poke around the living room with their clean smell, scrubbed skin, perfect teeth and polished boots.

One man cradles a snub nosed machine in his hands, like a pet.

'*So kleines Mädchen, wo sind deine Eltern?*' (German: 'So little girl, where are your parents?')

The language is harsh with 'k's but she understands. Even so, the second man, softer, gentler, asks her in what he thinks is Italian. '*Quindici bambina, bimba, dove sei i tuoi gianitori.*'<sup>1</sup>

She would laugh if she were not so awe struck. In school you put people in the corner with the word '*asino*' (ass) written on their paper hats for saying sentences like that. The teacher would take a ruler to your knuckles if you spoke like that. *Dove sono* (Where are), plural, she wants to say.

The first man fondles her ears and hair, as if this is a way to get her to speak. It burns where he touches. '*Ciao bella. Belli. Belle. Vieni qui.*'<sup>2</sup>

He pulls her hair as if it is a question his hands are asking. Where are your parents? In hair language. The bare shoulder is a hit too, as he cannot keep his strong fingers off the skin, brushing her neck, arranging her hair on the skin. Her mother was right. His eyes do not follow the dark shadows of her parents' guilt of the scuttling traces of the meal last night for ten, in a house where only five live.

Shame reddens her face. '*Kann ich die Medallia toccare.. er.. ber..ber ..*'

'*Berühren?*'<sup>3</sup>

---

He nods.

'Is it real gold?'

'*Wirklich. Wo haben Sie so gut Deutsch gelernt? Und ohne Akzent?*'

The second man taps his boot against the low table. 'Your parents? We asked you a question.'

'Papa? Mama?' she calls into the darkness behind the cloth that separates the living area from the bedrooms. 'We have visitors.'

Can they see, with their sharp translucent eyes, that this is all staged?

Her father enters the room, his shirt undone, unshaven: he looks like a fool. He sucks on his pipe. The man of the house. '*Buon giorno.*'

He does not play the role well. Cringes. Shrinks. Acts guilty. Even when he has done nothing wrong, he looks guilty of whatever people accuse him of. Years of being knocked about by her mother makes him skulk around the edges of walls like a dog.

'*Mein Vater,*' she says. '*Il mio papa.*'

Her father has many bad habits, the main one being that he is incapable of deceit.

She, on the other hand, takes after her mother, a maternal skill passed down the generations. She has been apprenticed in the art of lying from a very young age.

If only her father were not so... *trasparente.*

The first German, attracted to a victim as a dog is to a running rabbit, lunges at her father and pushes him up against the wall so hard that the sideboard shudders and the Mussolini picture claps onto its face.

'*Die Kommuniste!*' he spits. '*Wo sind sie?* (Where are they?') He reaches into his leather holster with his free hand and pulls out the steel gun. It's a scene from her nightmares. The man holds the gun to her father's head. Her father drops his pipe. '*D...dio santo.*'

Lina is holding onto her childhood. They have chickens, goats, and grow grapes which in season, she collects into big wooden vats and treads until her feet are stained purple. The damp cellar is lined with green bottles of wine. She collects *acqua minerale* from a spring in the hillside. Her mother bakes bread in the black-bellied oven, and they make pasta to dry in the sun on the stones outside the house, covered in lace to keep the flies away. It is all gone now. With one bullet to her father's head, it is all gone.

Her head hurts where they are pressing the gun into his. Can this *Tedesco* see in her father's eyes the nightly visits, the *partigiani*<sup>5</sup> who have eaten them out of house and home, who take whole cakes of their cheese, who doss down in the cellar?

Her father clutches a pouch of American tobacco, tobacco that cannot be purchased anywhere in Italy. Will they see that her father reeks of partisan? If so, they will kill him.

But Lina is an Alfieri. From a long line of stout women in black with tight headscarves who kick and bash their way through the world. Alfieri, a sign bearer, a fire!

'*Smettila! Lascialo solo.*' ('Stop that! Leave him alone.') Without thinking, she lunges at her father and holds onto him. The man pushes the gun barrel into her father's cheek so that his mouth is skewed. '*Dio santo,*' he says again.

The second man raises his machine gun so that she can see right down the small 'o' of the barrel.

She squeezes her body between her father and the man. 'If you kill him, you'll have to kill me too.'

The man pulls his weapon away. Laughs. Both Germans laugh. Is this funny? She clings to her father so he does not collapse into a heap of old clothes on the floor.

The German tousles her hair with the barrel of the gun, tickles her bare shoulder with its hard steel point. 'No one is going to kill you, *Tesoro*, (treasure) you are too beautiful.'

She stares with fierce eyes.

He plays with her hair with the gun, then holsters it.

She pulls her shoulder strap over her neck and hugs her dad tight. He is trembling; she is trembling.

In walks her mother, squeezing a rag. The man snaps back to attention as if his commandeer has walked into the room. Her mother does that to people. She may be dumpy and bent, but she commands. The man with the machine gun pushes it down so it stares at the ground. It looks ashamed.

'Mama.'

Her mother does not flinch. She is a perfect liar. Whatever fear inside her she has packed away tightly in the wet rag she squeezes. She shows her missing teeth and pink diseased gums in lieu of a smile. And then she makes a careless dismissive gesture towards her husband. 'Leave him alone. He's a *cretino.*'

That stops them. She elaborates. '*Dumkopf.*'

The second man smiles. '*der Dorftrottel?*'

She would normally rage at this, but like her mother she lies well. Her eyes are fierce. The *Tedesco* stares at her, his eyes making her swim.

They get it now. Maria is the *padrona della casa*. (mistress of the house) The father can be ignored. He bends slowly to pick up his pipe, stuffs it back into his mouth.

'*Frau...*'

'*Maria Cavedaschi. And this is my daughter Lina.*'

'Lina.' The *Tedesco* bows slightly to her and to her mother. 'Frau Maria, we are looking for the partisans who were here last night.'

'Here?'

---

She looks frightened. Clutches her apron. '*P...partisani?* Here? *Madre di dio.*' Good old mama. She says the word partisan as if Satan himself is in the room.

'We have been watching. At night, there have been many people coming in and out of your house.'

Papa Andrea, the *padrone della casa*, fumbles with his matches. He cannot light his pipe, he trembles so much. He is guilty, guilty, guilty.

But she doesn't turn a hair. '*Partisani?* Those low down scum of the earth. We lock our doors. Did they try to get in here? You saw them? When? Where did they go? If I catch one, I will...'

The *Tedesco* is taken aback. What he thought was going to be an interrogation is now a defence. 'Well. We have reports. We did not see them. But they blew up a bridge at *Passo della Cisa*<sup>6</sup> and then were tracked down to this village.'

'The bastards.'

He stares at Lina's bare shoulder as if trying to read something in small print on the nape of her neck. The dress keeps slipping down.

'Scum. They try to steal our food. They raid our vegetable patch. They take anything we do not lock up.' The mother reaches for Lina's flesh and pinches her cheek. 'See? Skin and bone. Wasting away.'

Lina is pushed into the centre of the room.

'No, she's...beautiful. You have a very beautiful daughter.' The man's cheeks redden.

'Wait... before you go, we have something for you. *Cretino* here works in the cheese factory. We want you to taste some of our cheese.'

She is not lying here. Their Reggiano is the best cheese in the whole of Reggio Emilia. 'Rosanna, bring the cheese!'

The youngest daughter, aged nine, who has been watching from behind the curtain, walks steadily into the room as if she is walking on a long tightrope. She carries a cake of cheese on a wooden platter the size of a man's head.

'You have another beautiful daughter, *Frau Cavedaschi.*'

'Three beautiful daughters. Lina, Rosanna and ...Ida? '*Vieni qui.*' (Come here)'

Ida uncoils herself from the wooden pole in the corridor and stands in the framed doorway.

The German nods to her too.

Maria pulls Ida, the middle girl, aged ten and a half, in line with the other two. 'Which of them is the prettiest, do you think?'

'Mama,' hisses Lina.

The *Tedesco* looks like a wolf with way too many teeth in his mouth. 'They are all equally desirable,' he says.

But a quick look at Lina betrays his preference.

Her mother cuts three thick slices of the cake. It crumbles onto the plate. Lina eyes it. She is forbidden to eat this cheese. She was once thrashed with her mother's belt for nibbling at the side like a mouse.

'Cavedaschi, get the plates.'

Her father is grateful to do something. He slides along the wall into the kitchen. Her mother makes the sign with her fingers around her ears that signifies madness.

She watches as the *Tedeschi* both bite into the cheese. Nod, smile, and then take more. '*Gud. Gud.*'

'Sorry, no bread. Bread is scarce.'

But food is their best weapon. And Lina's shoulder. And her blue eyes.

'You must be thirsty, too. Did Lina not offer our guests anything to drink? *Una bicchiere di vino?*' (A glass of wine?)

The *Tedeschi* are the clumsy ones now, politely declining. But she insists. 'Follow me to the cellar, you can choose one of our wines. We make it ourselves.' We have wine in our cellar, not partisans, she is telling them. We have nothing to hide.

They follow her, snoop around the dank corners. Lina hears them in the cellar, clinking bottles, their voices a rumbling repartee. When they emerge, each man clutches a green bottle of their best wine. Her father carries another bottle. He places it on the low table and uncorks it. This is something he is good at. He twists and pulls and pops. The smell of the red wine is strong. She can hear the effervescence.

'*Bicchieri*, come on, girls!'

Her mother pours generous glasses, motions the men to sit on the tiny stools and spread their legs wide, their leather creaking. Even her father sits.

'Well... a toast. *Cin cin.* To the men who are protecting us.' Her mother's lies are as thick as the cheese slices, so bad that she does not know how the *Tedeschi* do not see though her. But these men live on the surface of words too, their whole *Weltanschauung* a trough of words and lies and postures and stereotypes. This is the language they understand. They point their chins out like Mussolini. Here is someone they can talk to. Not muddy and dark Italians tangled with emotion, but light and blonde and blue eyed.

If she could count the times that the *Tedesco* stares at her, it would be a hundred. Every time she looks away, he steals a hang dog look, with calf eyes. And he stammers when she looks at him. This is the woman power her mother has been lecturing her about. You can make a man do anything you want him to if you have that power.

But it is not a good thing. She feels dizzy when she looks at him. Her body feels raw, her gut tight and her hands tingly. It is his uniform, she says to herself.

The *Tedeschi* drink, munch and nod, their eyes wandering to each daughter who stands on display, hands clasped in front of them as they have been taught at school to be ladies.

---

Or rather, bric-a-brac.

'We need to have the Fuehrer next to him, to complete the picture.'

Maria adjusts the portrait. 'If someone would give us a picture of the Fuehrer, he would find a good place here on the mantelpiece. There is room for him here.' She pushes aside the china statue of the Virgin Mary praying.

Her father is more at ease now, after a glass of wine. He pours a second round, his hand steady as he fills up his own glass. He downs the whole glass, burps. '*Dio santo.*'

'Cavedaschi. *Bastanza.*' (enough)

What other trick has Maria up her sleeve? It is overkill, but she reaches over to pull a thread in the man's uniform.

'*Lina e una sarta.*' (Lina is a seamstress)

'No mamma.'

'She learns these things at school. She could perhaps repair your jacket. Anything you need doing. You must be far away from home, from your wives?'

The man smooths down the thread. Laughs. 'I am not married, *frau* Maria. What makes you think I am married? I am only nineteen years old.'

'But you, a handsome man like you, have someone waiting for you?'

'No, no, no one waiting at all.'

'Maybe you will meet a pretty Italian girl while you are here?'

'Yes, maybe.' He laughs.

The second *Tedesco* places his glass down.

'Thank you for your hospitality.' Again that look. As if hospitality means something different, as if it is a promise.

'Your jacket?'

'I will return tomorrow.'

He is speaking to the mother, but he is really speaking to her.

At the door, he again speaks to the mother in low tones. 'A truly wonderful daughter you have.'

Lina is used to being talked about as if she is not there.

'Lina is going to be a singer when she grows up,' says her mother.

'Mama!'

'She will perform the opera in *La Scala* in Parma. You know *La Scala*?'

Her mother has never even heard opera. None of them

have ever been to *La Scala*, but neighbours from Fornovo have been telling her stories of the magnificence, the plush scarlet curtains, the stage and the applauding crowds.

'I am sure she will.'

He reaches for Lina's shoulder. 'Perhaps your daughter would like a ride in our jeep? Has she ever been in a car before?'

Lina opens her mouth but finds herself without words. Her cheeks are flushing now. Her mother pushes her away. 'Sorry, no. She... has a lot of work to do. The farm is a busy place. But maybe next time?'

She milks the cows in the morning, collects the eggs, picks vegetables, shells peas, husks the corn, but in the afternoon all her work is done.

'Next time then. I will bring some sewing?'

'*Afidesen.*'

She watches the men crunch on the gravel and down the road. She watches them mount the jeep, roar it into life, and sputter back along the road. Grey smoke lingers in the air. Only when she closes the door does her mother speak. The relief is like a high ringing in the air.

'*Brividi. Salamandi. Rospì. Sifilidi.*' (Creeps. Lizards. Toads. Syphilitics)

'Mamma?'

Her mother spits into the *Tedesco*'s glass. 'Clean them,' she tells Lina. 'I don't want their filthy Nazi fingerprints on our glassware.'

'But mamma?'

The younger girls are wide eyed at the change of personality of their mother. But Lina knows her mother to be a chameleon. She too is one: be whatever they want you to be.

'Can we go for a ride in the jeep too?'

Maria snatches her straw broom and sweeps around the girls' feet and they have to dance out of the way. 'No one is ever going for a ride in a German army vehicle while I am alive.'

The broom thwacks into corners, hitting table legs.

'And you?' Her father knows he is trouble. He collects his pipe and makes for the roof. This is where he can smoke in peace, watching the far off hills, the washing dancing in the breeze on hundreds of other rooftops. Today he stares at the dust road that passes Casa Bernini and traces the vehicle by its dust cloud and the tinny whine of its engine.

'But you invited them here tomorrow,' says Lina. 'You offered me to sew their clothes.'

'They won't come back. Just German politeness. And if they do, don't you go for a ride in their Nazi truck. Ever.'

Lina reddens, thinking of the man's eyes. She knows something her mother does not know.

'They won't come back. They were playing the same game we were playing. You just have to know the rules of the game. They knew perfectly well what we were doing.'

'What were we doing?'

For that, Lina gets a clip around the ear with the thimble.

But she knows differently. She feels it. She feels sick, she feels a wrenching in her gut, a dizzy spinning head. Like when you have the influenza. But more. Something is missing in her life that was not missing a few minutes before. That man has taken something of hers.

The room is darker and smaller and smellier, and her clothes shabbier than before.

### Author

Paul Williams has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin. He has lectured in universities in several countries and is currently a Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast (Australia). He has published a wide range of fiction, young adult novels, a memoir, educational readers, short stories, articles and crime fiction. His books have been set in schools across Africa.

### End Notes

1. Poor Italian: 'Fifteen child, small child, where is your parents?' He means to translate his previous question into Italian ('So little girl, where are your parents?')
2. Poor Italian: 'Hello Beautiful. Beautiful (masculine plural). Beautiful (feminine plural). Come here'
3. Poor German: 'Can I touch the medal? (she uses the Italian word here as she does not know the German one, and he corrects her: 'Touch?')
4. German: 'Really? Where did you learn German so well? And without an accent.'
5. Italian: Partisans (antifascist guerrillas who fought against Mussolini and Hitler and aided the Allies in World War II).
6. A mountain pass in Italy that marks the division between the Ligurian and Tuscan Apennines. It is located on the border between northern Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna.

### Five Haiku

people at the beach  
gazing at the sea –  
watched by gulls

a man putting leaflets  
in letter boxes –  
talking to himself

so quiet –  
i hear a fly  
land on the window!

late summer –  
a young magpie  
studies the campus grounds

at the library –  
a woman holding a book  
watching people

GRANT CALDWELL

### Robert Linhart's wife

Theory frequently has the actual effect of killing the power to come to conclusions and to take action' Kurt Eisner'.

In 1968, while the other students of Paris lifted pavés from the streets of the Latin Quarter, the Maoists of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* on rue d'Ulm, locked themselves in a meeting room.

The Maoists (*pur et dur* – hardcore) of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* dismissed the student uprising for its lack of 'proletarian content' and argued about the revolution of the *filis à papa* (rich kids).

At the meeting of the Maoists, when a woman (who happened to be his wife) spoke up in favour of joining the students, Robert Linhart responded:

'Leave!  
You do not have the right  
to speak here.'

SHANE STRANGE

### Face

Water rolling down the face of  
the weir pattern after pattern  
sliding down the face of the  
weir drumbeat in my earphones  
stuttering tentative repetition  
rolling clear hey genius it is  
clear falling repetition and each  
wave is different rolling pattern  
after pattern so clear water is  
sliding tentative down the face  
of its own drama washing white  
in a pattern like a drumbeat like  
a repetition stuttering like a  
candle form the same thing as  
well as the first time I was  
wondering how much you can  
find out how to get the latest  
version rolling pattern like a  
white brushstroke friction on  
the cement face of the weir  
wonder no more it is crisp and  
clear and completely  
irreversible

SHANE STRANGE

## Passionfruit Politics

GEORGIA ROSE PHILLIPS

We need to fight fascism, my grandfather said. At first, I thought he was talking to the passionfruit vines tangled around the wooden stakes of the trellis. He did not turn to look at me, he had been too busy searching. I was still in my pyjamas, staring into the bleary curtain of morning drawn around us, squinting. He was in his over-washed baggy white fronts that gaped like a spinnaker, waiting for the winds of progress to ensue. When I am old enough to read Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, I will draw a passionfruit vine in the background of Klee's *Angelus Novus*. I will add two magenta nipples, a grey hair curling. He was looking to see if any passionfruit were ripe enough for breakfast. I was looking for slugs that threatened the garden's sense of equilibrium. Fascism is the primary evil, he said again, before pausing contemplatively. And its biggest danger is that it can manifest under the guise of democracy. He lifted a vine to reveal a discrete green ball of something that barely looked capable of ripening to dark purple. The government's approach to mandatory detention, he continued, was less about judicial processing, and more about an iron-clad charade of deterrence. Tell me I am wrong, he added. You are wrong, I said. He stopped tussling the branch and looked up at me, mortified. An absence of words replaced his rambling distractedness. Tell me I am wrong is a *figure of speech*, he added, frowning. You are not wrong, I added quickly, as he went back to quietly exploring the vines. Through the strained silence came the croaky chorus of cicadas. The sudden heaviness of the humidity. Then, the frivolous skip of laughter that bled through the neighbour's navy Colorbond fence and blurred the distinction between what they thought belonged to them, and what they thought belonged to everyone else. I thought about the night before. We had watched a series of child appropriate movies. *The Lives of Others*. *Schindler's List*. History, my grandfather had said, with adoring enunciation, had to be learnt, as I sat there stupefied. Unable to comprehend the antics of the past. Now, when I see the etched pattern of the trellis behind *Angelus Novus*, an unripe passionfruit falls from the vine. As it hits the ground, the green skin burst open and a yellow liquid and black seeds peel down its skin, and I think of what it means to remember. I think of what it means to save the past.

### Author

Georgia is a casual academic and a PhD candidate in the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Creative Writing Program. She holds a BA. English Literature with a first-class Honours in Creative Writing, also from UNSW. In 2018, her creative non-fiction novella, *Holocene*, was shortlisted and then highly commended for the Scribe Nonfiction Literary Prize. Alongside her research, teaching and creative practice, Georgia works as a literary critic for the *Historical Novels Review*. Her work appears in *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Programs*, *Literary Veganism: An Online Journal*, *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, *The Historical Novels Review*, *Verity La*, *Southerly* (forthcoming), *The Wheeler Centre Notes*, *Tharunka* and *The Quo*.

### absolute shrew

from inside the workforce  
you can administer your printer  
gently fold one appearance  
around another  
be civil to local whistles  
then take charge of  
in-house materials  
staged in landmark buildings  
left nameless by  
the planners who planned them

you really shine  
in the casting call  
for the office scenario  
where an untrained child  
demonstrates the pitfalls  
of heavy lifting  
up a ladder

I cord my hair  
set barrettes in a kind of coronet  
to bring out the highlights  
which took 137 minutes to develop  
tie my belt in tribute  
be a cabochon in 'smart shoes'  
minus complex facets  
within a puffed data economy  
nailed to the floor by sundries

'houseproud' is a structure  
not a moral failing  
still the grubby bohemia  
of the local genius

who never repays the dinner invite  
remains unloved

*ferronnière*

the dangling jewel of her intellect

*historically*

the running list scrolls on  
as she detours to top up the caper reserves

ambition of the stone  
carried lightly in her pocket  
between transiting seedlike shapes  
as we confront the tragedy  
of her aimlessness  
keeping ourselves  
ceaselessly sharp with occupation  
look for the winsome ergonomics  
of sunken chairs in the lecture hall

forging consensus  
demurring to stretch more helpfully  
might detergent be  
too heavy a metonym  
(showing a baby a tree)

while trying to wash your clothes  
in a portable laundry  
they've put you in a headline  
and locked up the taps  
'for your own good'

ELLA O'KEEFE

### Another Danged Migraine

Father of my son's friend wants a Trumped-up t-shirt straight from America & I've (*what?*) suggested Appalachia as a place for my family to gather, the state of Georgia where in 1992 a former grand wizard of the ku klux klan made a run for president and got the vote though the north Georgia mountains, it must be told, are beautiful this time of year: chicken-yellow Sunkist-orange & blood-red-running.

*Guns* kill people guns kill people, my heart no longer beating a straight line. It's possible one can feel at home & be a stranger & feel strange & be at-home, fear growing stronger with age, like cellulite & moles.

Leader 1 says his penis is bigger than the missile that belongs to Leader 2 so they whip out their weapons of mass destruction & play with their light sabres like *whack! whack!* not even considering that my vagina mass-created three separate times, so take *that!* and *that!* and *that!*

The mountains aren't to blame. Who is to blame? Even I have a soft spot for my son's friend's father. Every person is unique, it's what makes life so...*great*. It's what makes my brain ache.

Another danged migraine.

Heather Taylor-Johnson

---

**River Run**

I read Jenny's Wellington poems again

her friends are constant  
flourishing by the Derwent  
season to season

by Hobart's Derwent, some of mine  
from half a life ago have blossomed

unwatered by visits from me, more deeply  
channelled, more tangled

into themselves, nourished by their gardens  
even while they dug them

melding themselves into their houses of sticks  
clay, stone, rearing children

making livings, earning livelihoods  
sending fledglings out into the world

when, one fine day, I come back, they put the kettle on

with tea we wash the dust of long roads

from our throats

the sky shines over the southern edge of the world  
clouds scud over our heads

we acknowledge with better grace now

the onward tug of the river, pulling us with it

**CATH KENNEALLY**

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