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About

The *Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* (*JAAAS*) is a peer-reviewed gold open-access journal which provides an interdisciplinary space for discussions about all aspects of American studies. The journal functions as a forum for Americanists in Austria and the global academic community. Published twice a year, the journal welcomes submissions on a wide range of topics, aiming to broaden the multi- and interdisciplinary study of American cultures.

Aims

Interrogating the notion of "America" and looking at the U.S. within its transnational and (trans-)hemispheric interconnections, *JAAAS* seeks to challenge disciplinary boundaries by bringing together original and innovative work by scholars who focus on topics as diverse as literature, cultural studies, film and new media, visual arts, ethnic studies, indigenous studies, performance studies, queer studies, border studies, mobility studies, age studies, game studies, and animal studies. Apart from offering insights into trans- and international American literary and cultural studies and offering European perspectives on America, the journal also solicits scholarship that deals with history, music, politics, geography, ecocriticism, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, law, and any other aspect of American culture and society.

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American Im/Mobilities

Edited by **Alexandra Ganser**, **Leopold Lippert**, **Helena Oberzaucher**, and **Eva Schörgenhuber**

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American Studies as Im/Mobility Studies

Introduction

In the aftermath of 43-year-old African American Eric Garner's murder by a police officer in New York City, Matt Taibbi's account of this "killing that started a movement," *I Can't Breathe* (2017), also tells the story of the gradual immobilization of the victim. Due to structural racism, Garner, once a promising athlete, gradually deteriorated physically and psychologically, with two long stints in prison for petty crimes, until his final immobilization in a police "chokehold." His death was a death semantically foreshadowed in the racial slur "deadbeat dad," which was used in the Reagan era to refer to unemployed Black fathers.[1] Garner "would have none of it," trying to resist the stereotype as best as he could by making a living on the streets, mostly bartering cigarettes illegally.[2] Out there, even Garner's smallest movements, Taibbi tells us, made him prone to suspicion and police violence. Taibbi succinctly connects the racialized street regime of policed mobility to Donald Trump's border wall: "Like Trump's wall, New York's new policing regime was also a form of border enforcement. It was about keeping 'the right people' off the streets, not through physical walls but through constant, demoralizing, physically invasive harassment."[3] In the epilogue, the wall imagery reappears when the author summarizes, "Garner kept running headfirst into invisible walls. Each time he collided with law enforcement, this unspoken bureaucratic imperative to make him disappear threw him back into an ever-smaller pen. Even allowing him a few feet of sidewalk space was ultimately too much. His world got smaller and smaller until finally even his last breath of air was taken away from him."[4]

Much has been written in the last two decades on the United States' mythology of mobility. Many publications describe how geographical and social mobility as well as their entanglements have been pivotal tropes in U.S.-American literature and culture. They discuss how American narratives and performances of mobility have celebrated individualism, in line with dominant models of American subject formation and nation-building.[5] Consequentially, American studies, inspired by the interdisciplinary field of mobility studies, has focused on journeys of exploration and "discovery" in this context, the Puritan "errand into the wilderness" (Perry Miller), westward expansion, the upward social mobility associated with the American Dream,

and space exploration as the tackling of new frontiers.[6] Such traditional, hegemonic tropes have perhaps not been adequately questioned by early mobility studies work, implicitly affirming a national mythology around the freedom of mobility that is deeply grounded in the United States' settler colonial history. Drawing on German sociologist Katharina Manderscheid, the correlation of exploration, discovery, and mobility may be characterized, following Michel Foucault, as a mobility dispositif of conquest, which retains mythological status in the U.S.[7] The conquest of the natural world as a conquest of time and space, as Lewis Mumford described it,[8] is encapsulated in the exploration and conquest of outer space, for instance; indeed, what Captain Kirk branded as the "final" (i.e., unlimited) frontier is portrayed in contemporary Hollywood by a plethora of cosmic border zones. The way these are dramatized and represented performatively affirms U.S. exceptionalism and its mythological promise of prosperity and leadership through conquest—sometimes territorial, sometimes economic, sometimes social; John F. Kennedy's idea of the "new frontier" of social reform, which historically inspired the concept of the "final frontier" by analogy, reveals that the frontier has also functioned as a left-liberal trope.

The protagonists of these narratives—explorers, adventurers, pioneers, and immigrant families searching for the promised land—have been cast as heroic figures of exceptional achievement in American literature and culture, from Mary Antin to Barack Obama.[9] Even though this Eurocentric, white male-dominated historiography has long been contested in the field of American studies, it continues to resonate in inadvertent ways: in tropes of American exceptionalism but also in the focus on mobility rather than immobility. The clichéd notion that "to be an American is [to] go somewhere, especially to go west," has certainly helped obliterate immobilities produced by hegemonic regimes of mobility in (and beyond) the United States.[10] Following cultural geographer Tim Cresswell, one of the founders of the interdisciplinary field of mobility studies, there are forms of mobility which are ideologically and culturally legitimate but simultaneously depend on types of mobility which are illegal(ized), socially despised, and/or unsanctioned.[11] Critical mobility research in American studies has accordingly set out to critique dominant scripts of American mobility as they are articulated in cultural forms and texts from gender-, race-, and class-critical angles, and, in the wake of the transnational turn in the field, from perspectives critical of and exceeding the nation state as cultures are themselves always in motion.[12]

The story of American mobility, even in its most critical form, can no longer be told in this way. With the development of mobility studies into a critical endeavor that equally addresses immobilization, the dominant script of the U.S. as what Sylvia Hilton and Cornelis van Minnen call a nation on the move appears as highly essentialist and exclusionary,[13] as it obliterates immobilities and forced mobilities from the

transatlantic slave trade to internment, incarceration, expulsion, and deportation (a recent estimate reveals that since the 1880s, 57 million people have been deported from the U.S.—far more than immigrants admitted).[14] As both gendered and racially orchestrated immobilities and immobilizations have come to the forefront in the course of the #MeToo and BLM movements, it is the inverse of the mythology of American mobility as a democratic practice available—or at least promised—to all that has become increasingly visible. Recent mobility studies scholarship has also called into question such dominant narratives for the ways in which they have served to obliterate *im*mobilities and forced mobilities, embodied in the U.S. context by the enslaved African, the Caribbean refugee, or the migrant waiting for deportation (to name but a few).[15] Seen in the larger and more recently developed discursive framework of mobility justice, a concept that arose from these very debates as well as from postcolonial mobility studies contexts,[16] immobilities and immobilizations need to be given scholarly priority without, however, falling back into misleading and untenable dichotomies between mobility and immobility, flux and stasis, "uprootings" and "re-groundings"—for, as Sara Ahmed and her co-authors importantly point out, "*being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached*."[17] Arguably, mobility justice starts with what NAACP President Derrick Johnson, on occasion of the George Floyd murder trial in late March 2021, called "the right to breathe," in reference to the smallest unit of physi(ologi)cal movement that enables any other form of mobility—the movement and circulation of air through the human lungs that make the heart beat, the brain function, and muscles move.[18]

Racialized immobilizations of African Americans, also discussed in Christina Sharpe's seminal *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), have always also triggered resistance.[19] Historian Mia Bay's monograph *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (2020), for instance, examines Black experiences on stagecoaches and trains, buses, cars, and planes, exploring the formation of—as well as the resistance to—racial restrictions of mobility by rescuing forgotten stories of undaunted African Americans who moved on in spite of harassment and ignorance.[20] Likewise, football players' kneeling down during the national anthem as a form of protest, and NBA games that had to be canceled because celebrations of Black athletic bodies seemed too cynical for many players as less desired Black bodies were being attacked and murdered, perform forms of resistance to structural racism that play on (im)mobilizations of African American bodies. The same holds true, of course, for gender-critical and queer interventions in dominant regimes of mobility that privilege patriarchal and heteronormative mobilities over others, in effect depriving the latter of their right to move.[21]

On each of these grounds, which we can only briefly broach for further critical discussion here, the 2018 Austrian Association for American Studies annual conference

"American Im/mobilities," from which this special issue of *JAAAS* stems, set out to reject the hegemonic, essentialist notion that U.S. citizens' allegedly greater mobility is evidence of a more democratic society. The conference set out to do so not only by bringing in sub- and transnational perspectives as well as gender-, race-, and class-critical angles, from the colonial period to the twenty-first century, but also by directing attention explicitly to American immobilities and immobilizations and resistance against racialized, gendered, and ableist regimes of mobility, especially in the wake of BLM and #MeToo activism. These angles are not to be understood as mere additions; rather than merely factoring into immobility as a glitch in the mythology of the freedom of mobility, discussions should rather revolve around combined im/mobility regimes and discourses.

During the conference, papers and panels problematized dominant narratives of U.S.-American mobility as they are articulated and represented in various media. They reflect on an age in which solidifying borders are again on the rise on both sides of the Atlantic and inhibit the mobility of many, while leaving a few untouched. Topics included the im/mobilities of settler colonialism, U.S. expansionism, and American imperialism; African American im/mobilities, from the plantation to the Great Migration and mass incarceration; further racialized or ethnicized im/mobilities (e.g., with regard to Japanese-American internment, immigrant and border narratives); "minor," or everyday, domestic, or intimate forms of mobilities; gendered and queer dimensions of im/mobility (e.g., the representation of "unsafe" spaces); ecocritical perspectives on mobilities; as well as alternative and resistant forms of im/mobility in various historical contexts.

With this special issue, we present a selection of conference papers brought into article form in order to further critically interrogate the mobility/immobility nexus, on the one hand, and highlight case studies that demonstrate the theoretical and methodological potentialities as well as challenges in crossing American and mobility studies, on the other. The contributions' as well as our editorial's decision to open this special issue with essays on African American im/mobilities also reflect on the present moment in which millions of African Americans are again facing voter disenfranchisement as a form of political immobilization and structural racism. Since American studies in Austria is primarily focused on the contexts of literary and cultural studies today, the essays in this volume revolve around representations, aesthetics, and discourses regarding the entanglements of mobilities and immobilities in U.S.-American and transnational contexts. With Cresswell, however, we understand those realms as tightly interwoven, focusing on im/mobilities in terms of "a politics of meaning."[22] In reverse, as Lesley Murray and Sara Upstone conclude, "The cultural text—word, image, sound—has always been, but is also more than ever before, a space of mobility," as "mobility cultures are negotiated in the context of dominant repre-

sentations—signifiers, which attempt to order and fix experience in particular politically charged ways."[23] In line with Murray and Upstone, this issue sets out to contribute to explorations of how "creative representations enrich our understanding of how mobilities function at scales from the local to the global" in an endeavor "to fully appreciate the complex spatial practices that make up both contemporary and historical movement—and the continuity between these," "look[ing] more intently not merely at how mobilities are represented, but at how they work through representation."[24]

The article that opens this special issue, Isabel Kalous's "Navigating Hostile Terrain with the *Green Book*: How a Travel Guide Mobilized African Americans during Segregation," is a vital reminder that the current discussion of the ways in which African Americans face structural immobilization is by no means limited to the present but has a long and complex history. In her essay, Kalous explores the narrative strategies of the *Green Book* (published from 1936 to 1966), a travel guide that helped African Americans experience (auto)mobility against the pressures of segregation-era immobilization. The *Green Book*, Kalous argues, did much more than provide information on "safe" (that is, hospitable to African Americans) accommodation, restaurants, and service stations; in fact, it encouraged African Americans to claim public spaces and thus actively challenged the spatial and social mechanisms of racist immobilization that restricted Black movement. In doing so, however, it reaffirmed the principles of the free market, promoting a middle-class lifestyle and consumer capitalism as a socially progressive force. Thus, as Kalous shows, the *Green Book* engages in ambivalent politics of im/mobility, as it tried to speak to and empower affluent Black readers in particular but, at the same time, was careful not to offend a white readership.

In "Black Im/Mobilization, Critical Race Horror, and the New Jim Crow in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*," Alexandra Hauke critically investigates the Black horror movie genre and looks specifically at *Get Out* (2017). While many horror films commonly reproduce structural racism and the immobilization of Black bodies, the author reads *Get Out* as a counter-narrative. Employing mobility studies and critical race theory, she defines critical race horror as a genre that is characterized not by silencing or actively perpetuating the horrors of racism but rather by encouraging a critical engagement with colorblindness and anti-Black sentiment. *Get Out* thus speaks to working toward Black mobility justice with the affordances of critical race horror. Ultimately, Hauke argues that by mobilizing Black subjects within the film, *Get Out* exposes racism and its entanglements as the true horror.

Next, Katharina Wiedlack's article, "'The Beast from the East': Mental Dis/Ability and the Fears of Postsocialist Mobility in North American Popular Culture," explores the

representational im/mobility dispositives attached to post-socialist orphan characters in contemporary North American film and television. Wiedlack combines critical race theory with queer theory and dis/ability studies in order to suggest that the figure of the "psychopathic post-socialist orphan" engages in forms of mobility that are configured as a threat to liberal Western societies. Critically reading the movie *Orphan* (2009) as well as the television series *Orphan Black* (2013–2017) and *Killing Eve* (2018–), Wiedlack argues that these orphan figures revitalize older Cold War fears of East–West mobility that would question the seemingly stable cultural difference between "the East" and "the West." This revitalization, however, is decidedly neoliberal: Wiedlack's analysis shows that the mobility of contemporary post-socialist figures does not pose a threat to an idealized white heteronormative society, but rather to the notion of Western societies as ethnically, sexually, and gender "diverse"—and thus, to their liberal self-conception as culturally superior.

In "'But I'm Not Even in a Wheelchair': Dis/ability, Im/mobility and Trauma in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*," Dorothee Marx explores the intersection of dis/ability and im/mobility by looking at the 2015 novel's protagonist Jude. Marx convincingly argues that the novel depicts disability as deeply intertwined with immobility, which needs to be overcome or made invisible in order to strive for American individualism and success. While the immobilizing effects of Jude's disability can be compensated for by his financial means, the traumatizing events in his life cannot be overcome by social or geographical mobility and render the protagonist permanently immobile. Thus, Jude's trauma and forced institutionalization stand in stark contrast to American narratives of linear progress and continual improvement. Ultimately, Marx reveals that the novel perpetuates prevalent norms about disability as a burden and a problem to be solved, demonstrating how disability and poverty are excluded from narratives of American success.

In the subsequent contribution, "The Speed of Dreams Versus the Inertia of Enlightenment: Fantastic Movements in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," Burak Sezer revisits the trope of a "foundational" American mobility and examines two different modes of such mobility represented in Pynchon's 1997 novel: the physical (that is, slow, arduous, and scientific) westward movement of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon's 1760s surveying expedition and the fantastic (that is, dream-like, airborne, and incredibly fast) mobility associated with their romantic imagination of the "unex-plored" American West. For Sezer, the clashes between physical and phantasmagorical mobility are at the center of Pynchon's critique of the Enlightenment: in *Mason & Dixon*, the world cannot be understood solely through scientific rationality and empiricism, but neither can it be contained by the simple drawing of a demarcation line. Instead, Sezer points out, Pynchon complements the historical Mason and Dixon's perspectives of geometry and astronomy with discourses of geomancy,

astrology, and parageography to offer a romantic imaginary of forms of mobility that defy the laws of physics.

Continuing in the vein of literary analysis, Leonardo Nolé likewise re-examines canonical U.S. literature through the lens of mobility studies. In "William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*: A Chronicle of Im/Mobilities," Nolé focuses on *Go Down, Moses*'s (1942) representation of a variety of social and technological forms of mobility as a cornerstone of Faulkner's literary commentary on the exploitation of people and land. Building on scholars such as Lawrence Buell and Judith B. Wittenberg, the author argues that the natural world of the book invites readers to reflect on its subjection to temporal and human agencies. In this reading, Faulkner offers the opportunity to explore the cultural meanings behind the main forms of modern mobility and their relationship with modernity at large, which is also reflected in his employment of a mobile literary genre that sits in-between the short story and the novel.

In her article "Mobility, Car Culture, and the Environment in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*," Tatiana Konrad re-reads this classic of social-realist literature from a mobility studies and ecocritical perspective. She views the novel as an expression of American perceptions of freedom of movement through individualized travel and critically reexamines its implications with regard to environment and ecology. In her argumentation, Konrad claims that *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) complicates the view of American mobility as liberating by examining the protagonists' journey as ultimately leading nowhere as well as at the novel's representation of fossil-fueled vehicles. While the novel does not openly critique car culture, it nevertheless opens up discussions about the disruptive nature of automobility and the ensuing environmental degradation.

Taken together, the seven articles in this special issue provide contemporary ways of thinking about the multiple regimes of im/mobility that have shaped the U.S.-American national imaginary at home and abroad. We hope that they will provide readers with a new and inspiring critical lens through which to read and reflect on literary and audio/visual works, and, by extension, on American landscapes, architectures, and bodily practices. Likewise, we hope that researchers in more established fields such as race and gender studies will find fresh angles to complement their methodological approaches.

Alexandra Ganser, Leopold Lippert,
Helena Oberzauchner, and Eva Maria Schörgenhuber
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Notes

1 Matt Taibbi, *I Can't Breathe: The Killing That Started a Movement* (London: WH Allen, 2017), 21.

2 Taibbi, *I Can't Breathe*, 21.

3 Taibbi, *I Can't Breathe*, 34.

4 Taibbi, *I Can't Breathe*, 303.

5 See Tim Cresswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001); Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Heike Paul, Alexandra Ganser, and Katharina Gerund, ed., *Pirates, Drifters, Fugitives in the US and Beyond* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), DOI: 10.33675/2012-82538586); Julia Leyda, *American Mobilities: Geographies of Class, Race, and Gender in US Culture* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016).

6 See Heike Paul, Alexandra Ganser, and Katharina Gerund, "Introduction," in *Pirates, Drifters, Fugitives in the US and Beyond*, ed. Heike Paul, Alexandra Ganser, and Katharina Gerund (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), 11–27.

7 Katharina Manderscheid, "Formierung und Wandel hegemonialer Mobilitätsdispositive: Automobile Subjekte und urbane Nomaden," *Zeitschrift für Diskursforschung* 2, no. 1 (2014): 5–31, DOI: 10.3262/ZFD1401005.

8 Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 172. See also Alexandra Ganser, "(Im)mobilität und Medialität im Hollywood-Weltraumfilm: *Interstellar* und *The Martian*," in *Mobile Kulturen und Gesellschaften/Mobile Cultures and Societies*, ed. Alexandra Ganser and Annegret Pelz (Vienna: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage/University of Vienna Press), 163.

9 Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012); Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Viking Press, 2020).

10 John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2007), 103, in reference to Alexis de Tocqueville's characterization. See also Paul, Ganser, and Gerund, "Introduction."

11 Cresswell, *On the Move*, 58. For a general, multidisciplinary overview of mobility studies discourses and methods, see Alexandra Ganser and Annegret Pelz, "Conceptualizing Cultural and Social Mobility Studies," in *Mobile Kulturen und Gesellschaften/Mobile Cultures and Societies*, ed. Alexandra Ganser and Annegret Pelz (Vienna: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage/Vienna University Press, 2020), 32–56.

12 On gender, see, for example, Susan Clair Imbarrato, *Traveling Women: Narrative Visions of Early America* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Alexandra Ganser, *Roads of Her Own: Gendered Space and Mobility in American Women's Literature, 1970–2000* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008); regarding class, see, for example, Cresswell, *Tramp*; Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2020), ch. 3.

13 On cultural mobility, see Stephen Greenblatt, Ines Županov, Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus, Heike Paul, Pál Nyíri, and Friederike Pannewick, *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

14 See Sylvia L. Hilton and Cornelis A. van Minnen, ed., *Nation on the Move: Mobility in US History* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2002).

15 See Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

16 Julia Preston, "Deportation Nation," review of *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants*, by Adam Goodman, *The New York Review of Books* (October 8, 2020): 27.

17 This is also one of the core perspectives explored by the University of Vienna's interdisciplinary research platform and FWF Doc.Funds PhD program "Mobile Cultures and Societies" and was the focus of the 2021 conference "Entangled Im/mobilities." A selection of work from the research platform has been published in the bilingual collection of essays *Mobile Kulturen und Gesellschaften/Mobile Cultures and Societies*, ed. Alexandra Ganser and Annegret Pelz (Vienna: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage/Vienna University Press, 2020).

18 Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in the Age of Extremes* (London: Verso Books, 2018).

19 Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller, "Introduction: Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration," in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, ed. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003), 1.

20 Derrick Johnson (@DerrickNAACP), "The right to breathe is on trial," Twitter, March 29, 2021, https://twitter.com/DerrickNAACP/status/1376570284988325892.

21 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). From a mobilities studies perspective, Sharpe's book can be read as a darker version of Paul Gilroy's seminal *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993): the former privileges the perspective of African immobilizations on the slave ship and the plantation (and, today, in the suffocating atmosphere of antiblackness), while the latter highlighted mobilization as a source of Black modernity, empowerment, and resistance.

22 See Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021).

23 On mobility as a right, see Tim Cresswell, "The Right to Mobility: The Production of Mobility in the Courtroom," *Antipode* 38, no. 4 (2006): 735–54. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2006.00474.x.

24 Tim Cresswell, "Understanding Mobility Holistically: The Case of Hurricane Katrina," in *The Ethics of Mobility: Rethinking Place, Exclusion, Freedom and Environment*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann and Tore Sager (New York: Routledge, 2008), 131, DOI: 10.4324/9781315616186.

25 Lesley Murray and Sara Upstone, "Conclusion," in *Researching and Representing Mobilities: Transdisciplinary Encounters*, ed. Lesley Murray and Sara Upstone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 191–92.

26 Murray and Upstone, "Conclusion," 193.

Navigating Hostile Terrain with the *Green Book*

How a Travel Guide Mobilized African Americans During Segretation

Isabel Dorothea Kalous

Abstract

This article examines the *Green Book*, a travel guide for African Americans published in the years 1936 to 1966. The *Green Book*'s aim was to help Black travelers navigate safely through hostile landscapes in the era of segregation. It did so by providing information on accommodations, service stations, restaurants, and other roadside establishments that welcomed African American customers. Drawing on a combination of literary, cultural, and mobility studies, this article analyzes the *Green Book* and its rhetorical strategies to illuminate the ways in which the guide encouraged African Americans to travel and claim public spaces. It argues that the *Green Book* was more than just a response to the cultural atmosphere of its time. As a means of resistance, it challenged the existing conditions that curtailed Black mobility and mobilized Black Americans.

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Keywords: *Green Book, The*; Black travel; racism; segregation; automobility; mobility

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Navigating Hostile Terrain with the *Green Book*

How a Travel Guide Mobilized African Americans During Segregation

Isabel Dorothea Kalous

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the growth of the automobile industry, the construction of new highway systems, and widespread car ownership fueled the mobility of many Americans. As a symbol of modernity, the automobile was euphorically welcomed and became a quintessential part of American life.[1] Driving on the open road was associated with freedom, independence, and autonomy. The dream of increased spatial mobility was within reach for the small but emerging Black middle class. For African Americans who had the financial means to purchase a car, it was evidence, not only of spatial, but also of social mobility and a representation of the progress toward racial equality that underscored their claim to national citizenship.[2] This group embraced the car because it afforded greater possibilities for efficient and convenient travel and, importantly, because it offered relief from the discrimination and humiliation Black travelers often experienced on public transportation. Historian Cotten Seiler asserts that for African Americans, "automobility's promise was one of escape from Jim Crow: upward through socioeconomic strata and outward across geographical space."[3] However, this new freedom of mobility had limitations. Mostly, the open road was hostile terrain for Black Americans and traveling by car could be fraught with danger, not only in the Jim Crow South, but also in the rest of the segregated nation.

Racial segregation restricted African American mobility: many roadside establishments, including tourist accommodations, restaurants, gas and service stations, rejected Black customers, which could turn family or business trips into difficult endeavors. Due to the discriminatory retail practices of many White-owned stores, a journey was not a spontaneous venture for Black motorists, but one that required careful planning and preparation. The car needed to be filled up with gas and stocked with food, blankets, and other necessities in case travelers were unable to find places offering room and board.[4] These trav-

elers had to rely on information about hospitable businesses spread by word of mouth until Victor Hugo Green, a postal worker from Harlem, began to collect and publish such data. To gather information on businesses amenable to African American travelers, Green relied on his network of fellow postal workers. Green's vision was to facilitate travel and help Black motorists circumvent discrimination on the road. In 1936, he published the first edition of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (often referred to simply as the *Green Book*), a booklet listing establishments where Black customers were welcomed that was modeled on a Jewish travel guide.[5] From then on, it was published annually for thirty years with only a brief intermission in the early 1940s.[6] The *Green Book* started out as a local guide listing businesses and points of interest in the New York area, but due to an overwhelming response, it soon broadened its geographic scope to cover a wide variety of tourist accommodations, restaurants, gas and service stations, beauty parlors, and tourist sites across the country.[7] Starting in 1949, the *Green Book* expanded its coverage beyond U.S. borders to include Bermuda, and later also Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and parts of Europe and Africa. In addition to providing information on various businesses, the *Green Book* also featured articles on places of interest and travel destinations near and far, modes of transport, Black entrepreneurs and prospering businesses, travel trips and recommendations, as well as rules for safe driving. During the peak of the Civil Right Movement, it also reported on the development of non-discriminatory policies in relation to travel, thus charting the degree of integration in a given locality. Over the three decades of its publication, the *Green Book* developed into "a roadmap to some of the most significant people, successful businesses, and most important political milestones of the twentieth century."[8] An important cultural document, the *Green Book* serves not only as a testament to the racial inequalities in tourist areas and beyond, but also as evidence of the multifaceted forms of resistance to the immobilizing forces of segregation by African Americans in the beginning and mid-twentieth century.

In recent years, the *Green Book* has garnered considerable attention from the public, museum curators, filmmakers, columnists, authors, and playwrights. For instance, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., which opened its doors in 2016, hosts a permanent interactive exhibit on the travel guide. Filmmaker Yoruba Richen's documentary *The Green Book: Guide to Freedom* (2019) sheds light on the guide as well as on Black entrepreneurship and Black recreational resorts. Several major newspapers and magazines featured stories on the *Green Book* and the topic of traveling while Black during segregation and today.[9] Moreover, the travel guide has inspired both a play and a children's book by Calvin Alexander Ramsey, as well

as book and photography projects by cultural historian Candacy Taylor, in which she photographed and documented properties listed in the *Green Book*. The New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has digitized over twenty editions of the *Green Book* that can be accessed online together with an online guide to related resources.[10] Since the early 2000s, the *Green Book* has also become the subject of scholarly research in the fields of history, cultural geography, mobility studies, and African American studies. For instance, scholars have illustrated the cultural significance of the *Green Book* in the history of African American travel and studied the guide in relation to race and consumption, automobility, and Cold War culture.[11] Candacy Taylor's latest book, with the programmatic title *Overground Railroad: The Green Book and the Roots of Black Travel in America* (2020), and the important works on Black travel in the era of segregation by historians Gretchen Sullivan Sorin and Mia Bay present the most in-depth studies of the travel guide.[12]

Drawing on a combination of literary, cultural, and mobility studies, this article adds to existing research on the *Green Book* by illuminating the ways in which it encouraged Black travel and challenged the existing conditions that curtailed the mobility of African Americans. The term "mobility" includes much more than mere movement from one place to another, as human geographer Tim Cresswell emphasizes. His approach to mobility provides a useful point of departure for considering mobilities in the *Green Book*. Cresswell argues that mobility can be understood as the entanglement of three intertwined aspects: the first one being that of physical movement; the second that of meaning (i.e., the representation of movement and the narratives associated with it); and the third that of practice (i.e., the way one moves and how this movement is experienced).[13] Taking these various dimensions of mobility into account allows for a better understanding of the significance of the *Green Book* as a means to enhance and facilitate physical movement as well as for its role in shaping discourses, representations, and practices of Black travel. An analysis of the *Green Book* and its rhetorical strategies will reveal that the guide was not only a response to its time and an effort to keep African American travelers safe but, importantly, served to mobilize African Americans literally and figuratively. Its textual and visual representations of Black mobility had the potential to change individual as well as societal perceptions of African American travelers, working to deconstruct common conceptions of travel and integrate Black travelers into tourist discourses from which they had been excluded. Studying Black mobility with the *Green Book* reveals the political dimension of seemingly mundane business and leisure trips, family vacation, and other kinds of journeys through which African Americans defied the spatial confinements and mobility restrictions that

segregation imposed on them. Significantly, not only activists fought to change the status quo: as Sorin puts it, "with each mile they traveled, ordinary African Americans challenged prohibitions that prevented them from traveling and from entering segregated spaces"; travel was thus a means "to claim the rights of citizenship and push the boundaries of racism."[14]

I will survey the historical contexts from which the *Green Book* emerged with respect to how segregation limited African Americans' travel options before analyzing how the guide challenged the status quo. The *Green Book* testifies to the many ways the movement of Black people was restricted, yet it also illuminates how people resisted and challenged the circumscription of their mobility. In addition, it demonstrates the importance of free, self-initiated movement, mobility, and equal access to public spaces in the struggle for civil rights and equality. The impairment of Black mobility during Jim Crow is but one chapter in the long history of controlling, monitoring, and limiting Black people's spatial, physical, and corporeal movements. And although the immobilization of Black people and the control over their every move was the strictest and most pronounced during slavery, the mobility restrictions continued, albeit in different forms, even after the formal abolition of slavery. From the late nineteenth century to the 1960s, institutionalized racial segregation systematically delimited Black Americans' opportunities for travel, as they encountered discrimination on the road, were relegated to the back of the busses and the third-class compartments on trains, and were kept from moving freely in public spaces. The legacies of enslavement and segregation, in particular their immobilizing forces, influence Black people to this day. Therefore, the article concludes by examining how Black mobility continues to be circumscribed in the twenty-first century.

(Auto)Mobility and Segregated Landscapes

In the early twentieth century, the car became an instrument "of defiance and dignity in the journey to full equality" for Black Americans.[15] Car ownership did not facilitate travel but allowed those who could afford it to avoid the discomfort and inconvenience they so often experienced on public transportation. However, driving through a segregated nation, Black motorists were confronted with innumerous obstacles. Since the advent of the motor age, when automobility began to offer African Americans the opportunity for enhanced spatial and social mobility, a combination of racist laws and regulations, economic practices, and social customs established impediments for Black travelers and made journeys by car difficult and dangerous. African Americans encountered segregated tourist spaces with accommodations, roadside rest areas as well as service and auto repair stations that refused to serve them. Bay describes this practice as "economic disenfranchisement."[16] Moreover, the discrimi-

natory policies of urban highway planning, racial disparities in car financing and insurance systems as well as the rejection of African American members by the American Automobile Association further limited the opportunities for automobile travel.[17] On the road, Black motorists were disproportionately targeted by law enforcement officials and frequently experienced harassment by White segregationists to whom "black car ownership was itself an affront," especially in the South.[18] Rampant racism and hostility were particularly startling in the notorious sundown towns—all-White communities that threatened African Americans with violence should they be caught within city limits after sundown. In his important study of sundown towns, James W. Loewen points out that although thousands of sundown towns existed throughout the country, they were mostly a northern, midwestern, and western phenomenon.[19] For this reason, motoring was dangerous for African Americans not only in the South, as is often assumed, but in all parts of the nation. To avoid being in the wrong place at the wrong time, Black travelers had to plan their routes and stops carefully. The interlocking system of formal and informal political and social practices erected spatial confinements for African Americans and circumscribed their mobility.

Scholars in the fields of architecture and in cultural and historical geography, who have examined the relationship between space and race, highlight how the built environment partakes in the social construction of race.[20] Dianne Harris maintains that the built environment "must be examined as an active agent in the formation of ideas about race, identity, belonging, exclusion, and minoritization."[21] Concepts such as "the architecture of racial segregation" and "racialized landscapes" express how spatial parameters reflect and produce power relations and racial hierarchies, thereby fostering differentiated mobilities.[22] During segregation, these tourist spaces were characterized by hostility and White supremacist attitudes that manifested in segregated accommodation, swimming pools, beaches, parks, and other areas of recreation and relaxation. In a similar manner, racial differences were inscribed in the architecture. For example, bathrooms located in the rear of a building, separate water fountains, closed-off areas, and "Whites Only" signs enforced exclusion and restricted African Americans' access to public spaces. As the cultural and historical geographers Derek H. Alderman and E. Arnold Modlin Jr. stress, these segregated environments were "spatial expressions of control that materially support[ed] white privilege and legitimize[d] racial segregation and inequality."[23] Segregated tourist landscapes, therefore, did not only limit travel and recreation for African Americans, but were "part of a broader denial of the legitimacy of their identity and right to belong."[24]

The *Green Book* testifies to the racial inequalities and the repression of Black travel. Yet, its mere existence is evidence that Black Americans challenged the status quo. In response to the exclusion that African Americans experienced on the

road and the denial of unbounded mobility, they "created an entirely separate tourist infrastructure, including their own travel guides and travel agencies that directed travelers to places where they would be welcome without fear of humiliation."[25] The fact that African Americans traveled to visit family, for business purposes, and for pleasure—despite the many uncertainties and violence they often encountered while traveling—has to be seen as a direct challenge to Jim Crow segregation. The seemingly mundane act of exercising one's mobility gains a political dimension in this context; it can therefore be understood as part of a protest tradition against anti-Black discrimination, oppression, and the deprivation of civil rights.

The significance of mobility and its implications for African Americans' striving for modern citizenship, freedom, and equality becomes particularly evident when examining the bus boycotts and freedom rides during the Civil Rights Movement. But long before the memorable protest of Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat to a White passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, Black travelers challenged racial segregation and discrimination on public transport, as the important work of the historians Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor and Blair L. M. Kelley reveals.[26] Pryor's *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* (2016) illustrates that even prior to the Civil War, free African Americans from the North understood free movement and equal access to public spaces as quintessential aspects of their citizenship and found manifold ways of resisting segregationist policies on street cars and trains. Examples of such resistance include arguing with fellow White passengers and railroad personnel, writing letters of complaint to state representatives, and suing railroad companies. It also included physical resistance: journalist and civil rights activist Ida B. Wells famously bit a train conductor who tried to remove her from the ladies' car and force her into the "colored car" although she was in possession of a first-class ticket.[27] By fighting for equal rights on public transportation, activist travelers such as Wells established a protest tradition in the early nineteenth century that informed succeeding struggles for freedom of mobility and full citizenship.[28] The Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which was a fight over the right to unrestricted travel for Black Americans that led to the institutionalization of racial segregation in public spaces in 1896, and the ensuing struggles for mobility rights highlight the significance of free movement in the fight for equality.

The *Green Book* took part in the larger struggle for full citizenship rights and equality. During its three decades of publication, it encouraged African Americans to travel and thus stake a claim to public spaces controlled and dominated by Whites. African Americans did so by means of small, everyday acts of dissent, such as patronizing Black-owned businesses advertised in the *Green Book* and traveling despite the obstacles and violence they encountered on the open road. Understanding these common practices as forms of resistance expands narrow ideas of activism, which,

as Robin D. G. Kelley endorses in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1994), not only pertains to formal political protest, demonstrations, and strikes but also to unorganized practices that defied White supremacy.[29] Importantly, Black travelers challenged the discrimination and inequality they encountered on the road and beyond in both revolutionary and everyday ways.

Revolutionizing Black Travel with the *Green Book*

Victor H. Green and his team—among them Alma D. Green, his wife, who oversaw publication upon Green's retirement in the 1950s—dedicated their work to improving travel for African Americans by making it easier, safer, and more pleasant. As the editors explain, "It had been our idea to give the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable."[30] In light of the perils that African Americans faced on the road, the *Green Book* assumed the crucial role of providing protection and safety, easing some of the anxieties connected to traveling. The slogan "Assured Protection for the Negro Traveler" that appeared throughout the pages of numerous *Green Book* editions indicates its significance as a survival guide. The *Green Book* was also referred to as the "Bible of black travel" and thus indispensable for African Americans navigating their way around a racist country.[31] Although similar guides for Black travelers existed in the early and mid-twentieth century (such as *Hackley and Harrison's Hotel and Apartment Guide for Colored Travelers* [1930–31], *Grayson's Guide: The Go Guide to Pleasant Motoring* [1953–59], and Travelguide [1947–63]), the *Green Book* was published over a comparatively longer period of time and attained a maximum circulation of approximately two million, indicating its importance and the high demand for such a guide.[32] As one reader wrote in a correspondence letter to the editors, "It is a book badly needed among our Race."[33] Travelers could order the *Green Book* directly from the publisher or buy it in bookstores and at Esso service stations. Esso Standard Oil (today ExxonMobil) played a key role as a sponsor and distributor of the *Green Book* and was among the first corporations to franchise businesses to African Americans.[34] Recognizing the potential value of an expanding African American market, Esso sought to appeal to Black customers and hired two African American marketing executives who promoted the guide and whose testimonials are featured in several *Green Book* articles.

The target audience for the *Green Book* ranged from vacationers and business travelers to those traveling with schools, clubs, sororities, and fraternities, in addition to convention participants. In the hands of these travelers, the *Green Book* was a powerful tool: knowing where to find roadside establishments that welcomed Black customers could not only facilitate travel, it also allowed African Americans to forgo discriminatory retail practices of White-owned businesses where they could

be charged higher prices and receive inferior quality of goods and services.[35] The *Green Book* promoted hospitable businesses and encouraged its readers to patronize these establishments, eventually including over 9,000 places listed in the publication. Most of these were Black-owned businesses, therefore supporting them also served as an act of racial solidarity.[36] This practice exemplifies how African Americans used their economic power to challenge corporate discrimination and attests to the social and political impact of consumption and commonplace economic practices that Lizabeth Cohen details in her study on postwar consumer culture.[37] To ensure that businesses were compliant with certain quality standards, the *Green Book* regularly asked for feedback from readers, promising an immediate investigation should travelers report an unsatisfactory experience, which could then lead to the removal of the respective business ad from the guide's pages.[38] The opportunity to file a complaint was a distinctive form of consumer agency and control given to African Americans travelers. It presented, as Michael Pesses points out, "an inversion of power hierarchies on the road."[39]

The long listings of business ads that comprised the majority of the sometimes one-hundred-plus pages of the *Green Book* were interspersed with short text passages containing introductory statements and forewords by the editors explaining the purpose and achievements of the guide, testimonial letters by readers praising its indispensability, commentaries by Esso marketing representatives, feature articles connected to travel (e.g., descriptions of prominent tourist destinations such as New York City and Chicago), travel reports, and articles introducing new or improved modes of travel and transportation (e.g., the 1951 "Railroad Edition" and the 1953 "Airline Edition"). These texts avoided explicit mention of the many risks and hazards inherent in traveling. When segregation and incidents of racism were touched upon, they were described as "painful embarrassments . . . which ruined a vacation or business trip" that could be bypassed with the information provided in the book.[40] Racist encounters and discriminatory practices were euphemistically denoted as "embarrassments," "difficulties," "inconveniences," "aggravation," and "handicaps," presenting only a veiled critique of segregation. The *Green Book* never explicitly stated the imminent risks that Black travelers were likely to encounter; only subtle references pointed to the fact that travel was dangerous for Black Americans. Similarly, the phrases that regularly appeared on *Green Book* covers advised travelers to "Keep this Guide in Your Car for Ready Reference" and to "Carry your Green Book with you… you may need it…"[41] These words of advice alluded to the unpredictable nature and timing of racialized violence on the road. For African Americans, they served as a reminder to exercise vigilance and caution while traveling.

Instead of focusing on the difficulties of travel that presented themselves to Black motorists and travelers, the *Green Book* articulated its faith in a brighter future. In

the introduction to the 1948 edition, the editors asserted,

> There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment. But until that time comes we shall continue to publish this information for your convenience each year.[42]

The statement, reiterated in subsequent editions, was not just an expression of the editors' aspirations for easier travel; it was evidence of their steadfast belief that major societal and political changes were on the horizon. The optimism with regard to racial reforms demonstrated in this and various other passages was grounded in the authors' faith in political "leaders to sustain the priceless possession of racial freedom and dignity" as well as in the assumption that interaction between people would lead to a better understanding and eventually to racial integration.[43] The *Green Book* further expressed its belief in the mechanisms of the consumer market to bring about economic equality. By drawing attention to the profit that could be made by catering to African Americans, the *Green Book* reflected its trust in the governing principles of the free market: African American travelers were willing to spend money, the guide proclaimed. Therefore, both Black and White businesses were well advised to place their advertisements in the *Green Book* to take advantage of the spending power of Black customers: "this guide is read and used by over 225,000 people for travel information, . . . they spend annually $112,500,000," the *Green Book* informed its readers and advertisers in the early 1950s.[44] The *Green Book* spoke to the assumption that all White businesses would eventually cater to Black customers, if not for moral, then for economic reasons.[45]

When talking about the developments underway in the travel business, the *Green Book* maintained a lighthearted and cheerful tone. The 1953 "Airline Edition" of the *Green Book* praised the possibilities of air travel, which allowed for a faster and more convenient way to traverse large distances. In the text and in the caption to an image of an airplane, air transportation is described as "the miracle of modern travel" that "symbolizes the new freedom of Americans to travel abroad."[46] Intriguingly, "Americans" is used in this instance to denote both White and Black travelers. In contrast to the many instances in which the *Green Book* explicitly distinguished between travelers on the basis of race, the phrasing here attests to the certainty that air travel would provide equal tourism opportunities for African Americans. While praising this new mode of transportation for its efficiency, there is no mention of airlines' discriminatory practices or the segregation of airport facilities which lasted until the early 1960s. Nothing in the text suggests that African Americans had to fight for the desegregation of airport terminals, transforming them into "sites of conflict—. . . ter-

ritories of confrontation over the renegotiation of racial identities in postwar America," as Anke Ortlepp's study the desegregation of American airports shows.[47] Rather than illuminating the difficulties that presented themselves to Black travelers, the *Green Book* expressed the firm conviction that Black Americans, like all Americans, belonged on planes.[48]

Numerous other examples of text passages and images depicting (Black) travel indicate that the *Green Book* laid claim to the mobilities it displayed.[49] For example, the 1963–64 edition featured a photograph that depicts a young Black woman at the beach, leaning against a palm tree, a coconut drink in her hand.[50] The illustrations of Black travelers engaging in leisure and recreational activities tried to normalize Black travel and inscribed African Americans into tourist discourses from which they had hitherto been absent. The guide's textual and visual depictions of Black travel also demonstrated African Americans' economic strength and achievements. The *Green Book*, as Seiler observes, portrayed "African Americans as upwardly and outwardly mobile vacationers, habitually mobile business travelers, and blithely gallivanting consumers."[51] These depictions signaled that African Americans had become part of an affluent and mobile middle class, disregarding the fact that many vacation sites remained segregated areas. By introducing various travel destinations and tourist attractions near and far, the *Green Book* summoned Black people to travel, explore the nation, and access and claim public spaces: "There is much to be seen and more to learn, of this our land which offers everything of beauty, wonder and history," announced the *Green Book*.[52] Encouraging African Americans to travel the world, the guide highlighted the nearly unlimited opportunities for travel and suggested jokingly that the sky was the limit: "a trip to the moon? Who knows? … When travel of this kind becomes available, you can be sure your *Green Book* will have the recommended listings!"[53]

Rather than exposing the hardships of Black travel, the *Green Book* illuminated the varied options for tourism and kept an optimistic and positive attitude. Some interpret its reluctance to explicitly refer to the hazards of traveling while Black and its restrained and accommodating tone as signaling "an acceptance of how life simply [was]."[54] However, the context of the *Green Book*'s production and reception has to be considered in order to understand the necessity of guarded, carefully worded texts. The *Green Book* editors certainly knew how to use a "coolly reasoned language [that] put white readers at ease and allowed the Green Book to attract generous corporate and government sponsorship"—for example from Esso and the United States Travel Bureau, both of which supported and participated in the production of the guides.[55] The controlled tone and the ambiguity used with regard to topics such as racial discrimination and violence is certainly attributable to the *Green Book*'s goal of addressing a heterogeneous clientele that included African Americans, White sym-

pathizers, business owners, and financial sponsors. When the title was changed to *The Travelers' Green Book* in 1960, it indicated that the guide was also intended for the use of White travelers (although it clearly continued to cater to African Americans). White readers likely approved of the non-offensive, accommodating, and sophisticated language of the guides.[56] For African American readers, the subtle references to the dangers and plights of traveling while Black were certainly obvious.

The *Green Book*'s nuanced formulations reflected conscious editorial choices to address Black readers without offending or provoking White supporters and sponsors. For the most part, it did not employ language that explicitly opposes policies of racial segregation. Nonetheless, it used expressions that Brent Staples describes as the "African-American art of coded communication, addressing black readers in messages that went over white peoples' heads" and which were not overlooked by an attentive Black readership.[57] For instance, a list of the "do's and don'ts of driving" specified the following traffic regulations and recommendations:

> Obey all traffic regulations.
> Be sportsmanlike with fellow-drivers.
> Start earlier, progress slower and keep speed reasonable.
> Don't drink and drive.
> Danger increases with darkness; cut speed at dusk to keep within brake range of headlights.
> Stay in traffic lanes, do not pass without ample room and never do so on hills or curves.
> Keep ample stopping space between your car and the car ahead.
> Be watchful at intersections; be sure to signal your intentions to turn or stop.
> Check brakes, windshield wipers, tires and steering mechanism before you start on that trip.[58]

While these traffic recommendations are surely reasonable and apply to all motorists, Black or White, they were particularly relevant for African American drivers. The phrasing implicitly pointed to the dangers of what has come to be known as "driving while Black"—that is, the practices of racial profiling and harassment of Black drivers by law enforcement officials. Moreover, the proper functioning of the car was imperative for Black motorists because car service was not available for them everywhere and roadside breakdowns were dangerous. Taking these precautions was essential for Black drivers' safety. Equally important was the strict observance of all traffic rules and regulations so as not to attract unnecessary attention. Even minor traffic violations could have serious consequences. Still, correct behavior was never a guarantee for safety or a means to avoid racist encounters with other drivers or police officers. The comparative used in the third sentence as well as the recommendation to behave "sportsmanlike" toward other drivers seems to imply that other, suppos-

edly White, drivers were likely to cause trouble. Black motorists were thus advised to be particularly careful around White drivers.

Similarly, the *Green Book*'s "Safe Driving Rules," which appeared in several editions, reminded African American drivers that the open road was highly racialized terrain: "Watch out for the driver who crosses the White Line" is one such example.[59] The emphasis of the words "White Line" through their capitalization suggests that this advice not only referred to possible accidents caused by cars crossing the white dividing line on the street separating traffic; rather, it likely alluded to the perpetual dangers Black travelers faced. By extension, the phrasing also invokes what W. E. B. DuBois called "the color line," referring to the divide between Black and White Americans that he perceived as the most pressing problem of the twentieth century.[60] Equally intriguing rhetoric was used in a feature article by the Esso marketing representative James A. Jackson. He wrote, "Today, our thousands of travelers, if they be thoughtful enough to *arm* themselves with a Green Book, may free themselves of a lot of worry and inconvenience as they plan for a trip."[61] Formulating this as "arming" oneself with the *Green Book* to "free" oneself adds a subversive undertone to the text, referencing the thousands of travelers who could possibly be mobilized to combat discrimination on the road as well as anywhere else.

However, implicit or explicit subversive statements were limited in the *Green Book*. Instead, it created positive and affirmative narratives of Black economic, social, and political progress by depicting African American entrepreneurs and successful business owners, as well as striving Black communities. The 1949 edition of the *Green Book* introduced Robbins, Illinois, a majority-Black suburb in the Chicago area, as "the fastest growing town in the state of Illinois . . . owned and operated by negros" and encouraged travelers to "take a look at an experiment of an exhibition of what negroes working together can do."[62] By presenting such a flourishing community, the *Green Book* countered the racist perception that Black communities were poor, backward, and unsafe. Likewise, another edition recommended visiting Louisville, Kentucky, because "this city, of the colorful Bluegrass State, is blessed with a rare blend of history, progress and tradition that offers much interest to the visitor."[63] The article detailed the social advancement of the city's African American inhabitants, highlighting Louisville's efforts to decrease illiteracy, increase Black home and business ownership, amplify Black voting power, and support the city's prospering Black cultural life.[64] By presenting the demographics of the place, the *Green Book* demonstrated the achievements of the Black community. It highlighted the progress made despite all the adversity to endorse claims for citizenship.

The travel destinations that were recommended by the *Green Book* together with the advertisements for certain products signaled a middle-class lifestyle and

revealed the guide's target audience as Black middle- and upper-class travelers with the appropriate financial means, such as professionals, business owners, doctors, teachers, those traveling with schools, clubs, sororities and fraternities, and convention-goers. The guides also promoted a code of behavior that was considered middle-class, displaying the respectability of African Americans through the goods and services they consumed. A case in point is an entry with the title "...Two Weeks with a Pay," which not only offered tips for planning a trip but also recommendations on what to pack and wear.[65] Furthermore, the article advised travelers to be on their best behavior: "Let's not forget that wherever we may visit we must behave in a way to show we've been nicely bred and was taught good manners. So don't leave these valuable commodities home. Take them with you and display them at all times. As travelers we are good-will ambassadors of our race among those who perhaps are unfamiliar with us."[66] Besides promoting a certain appearance and polite behavior, the passage addressed another key aspect of the guide's stance on travel: the potential of travel to improve the understanding between Black and White Americans. At a time when travel was seen as an educational opportunity for Americans to learn about the nation and a way "to cultivate a sense of civic identity," the *Green Book* introduced the idea that travel could also help overcome discrimination and White racist attitudes.[67] Travel was presented as an opportunity to learn something new, explore other places, and meet people of different backgrounds; hence, it was a means of facilitating interracial encounters. To inquire about the local attitudes toward Black travelers and collect information on businesses, *Green Book* correspondents were sent to different states throughout the West. The replies these correspondents received from the locals were printed in the 1948 edition, among them responses from North Dakotans. One respondent informed *Green Book* readers that because of the minuscule number of Black people in the region, they remained "a curiosity."[68] The respondent further stated: "Ignorance is the root of prejudice."[69] In another response, African Americans were encouraged "to visit North Dakota, not only for the tourist attractions, not only because of the friendliness of her people, but because of these visitations would enable North Dakotans to better know and understand a great part of our national citizenry."[70] The idea that travel transforms a person, inspiring self-reflection and personal development, is altered in this instance. It is not the traveler who is educated by the encounter but the (White) locals of North Dakota. Black visitors, the *Green Book* hoped, would encourage North Dakotans to rethink their preconceived notions of African Americans, challenge their narrow-mindedness, and dismantle prejudice. This idea was reiterated in a later edition in which travel was described as a possibility to "create better understanding between the peoples of the world. Fear is an emotion we experience only of the unknown."[71] This statement elucidates that the *Green Book* envisioned travel as a way to foster understanding and empathy between people, demonstrating its hopes for integra-

tion. According to this belief, every Black traveler represented the larger collective as a racial ambassador and could actively combat racism and prejudice through practices of travel.

Over its thirty-year period of publication, the *Green Book* reflected the social and political changes that occurred as the nation "transitioned from a Jim Crow era stained with the colonial and antebellum legacies of enslavement and racial prejudice through the civil rights movement of the 1960s and beyond," thus "provid[ing] a barometer for the evolving state of race relations in US cultural history."[72] As of its overall tone, it became more outspoken and political, mirroring the transition from the period of legal segregation to the civil rights era. The 1958 edition of the *Green Book* took an assertive stance toward civil rights and informed readers about the non-discriminatory policies of national parks, underscoring that Black visitors had the right to equal treatment.[73] In the early 1960s, the *Green Book* stated that "history shows the rewards gained when a race made its own struggle against the ebb and flow of local and national passions. No one esteems freedom given or sought without it being earned. We have had our torch-bearers. We have them today."[74] In this passage, the *Green Book* acknowledged the significance of Black activist struggles. It further emphasized the necessity to challenge existing conditions and expressed its confidence that these struggles would eventually lead to successful integration.

The last two editions of the *Green Book*, published by Langley Waller and Melvin Tarpley who took over the travel guide in the 1960s, were explicit about their support of institutions such as the Congress of Racial Equality and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. It supported their demands for equal rights and privileges for African Americans, postulating that "the Negro is only demanding what everyone else wants . . . what is guaranteed all citizens by the Constitution of the United States."[75] To support Black (activist) travelers, the *Green Book* included information on the different state statutes on segregation regarding public accommodation and places of recreation. The 1963–64 edition informed readers of their rights, gave instructions on how complaints were to be handled if travelers experienced unlawful discrimination, and laid out the sanctions (such as fines, license revocations, and criminal charges) that were imposed on violators.[76] Sorin remarks that "the descriptions of the violations suggest that readers were encouraged to take direct action: to file lawsuits, to seek monetary damages against wrongful action, and to demonstrate."[77] By providing this crucial information, the *Green Book* supported the civil rights struggle on the road. In doing so, the editors likely understood their work as a service to the community and therefore saw themselves as activists.[78] This observation underscores that the *Green Book* was much more than only a response to its time but a means of resistance.

The *Green Book* ceased publication two years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made segregation illegal. The final edition did not indicate whether the editors ended publication because they considered a guide for Black travelers obsolete by the time; whether it succumbed to mounting criticism for upholding a division between Black and White travelers; or whether Black travelers preferred to patronize White-owned accommodations because of the higher standards with which Black businesses could often not compete.[79] Regardless of the reasons for its suspension, the *Green Book* remains an important document that bore witness to the courageous struggles and triumphs of African American travelers in their defiance of segregation and racial discrimination. An indispensable tool for Black travelers, the guide made journeys through segregated landscapes safer and easier. The *Green Book* facilitated travel and encouraged Black Americans to venture into spaces dominated by Whites, thereby challenging the racialized spatial order and Black people's exclusion from public spaces. Moreover, positive narratives of Black travel together with visual representations of Black travelers altered perceptions of travel and inscribed African Americans in tourist discourses dominated by White travelers. The *Green Book* mobilized African Americans and motivated them to keep moving forward; literally, by traveling across the nation and around the world, and figuratively, by moving forward on the road to equal rights and justice.

Black Im/Mobilities Today

The *Green Book* editors articulated faith in a future in which Black Americans could travel freely and without discrimination. Clearly, their vision has not yet been realized. Although the opportunities for travel have increased in the post-civil rights period, today, more than a half-century after the last edition of the *Green Book* was published, the mobility of people of color remains delimited, as innumerous examples affirm: as recently as 2017, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) issued two nationwide travel advisories, the first of its kind in the history of the organization. One advisory alerted Black travelers to use extreme caution when visiting the state of Missouri due to a number of racist incidents that had been reported; another was issued for American Airlines after Black passengers had reported discriminatory and disrespectful conditions aboard the airline's planes.[80] Moreover, contrary to popular assumption, sundown tows are not a relic of the Jim Crow era. The existence of all-White towns or neighborhoods that practice racial segregation continues to pose considerable risks for Black travelers.[81] These and other examples—such as racial discrimination on Airbnb, the controversial screening program conducted by Transportation Security Administration agents at U.S. airports, the over-policing of drivers of color, and stop-and-frisk policies—strikingly illuminate how Black people's travel options are limited and how their physical and

spatial mobility is circumscribed. The issue of Black mobility also constitutes a key concern of the Black Lives Matter Movement as free movement and mobility remain central in the ongoing fight against discrimination and the struggle for justice.[82] As Rod Clare notes, "Implicit in the rise of the BLM and its attendant demands and concerns is the long-standing issue of black mobility. That is, *where* can black people go and *when* can they go there?"[83]

In the same year that the NAACP issued their travel advisories, Jan Miles published a book titled *The Post-Racial Negro Green Book* (2017).[84] Modeled after the original *Green Book*, the book's cover is an almost exact replica of the 1940 edition of the *Green Book*. A closer look, however, reveals that instead of the words "Hotels, Taverns, Garages" etc. that are listed on the original publication, *The Post-Racial Negro Green Book* lists "Systemic Racism, Police Brutality, Mass Incarceration, Overpolicing, Sentencing Disparity, Racial Profiling, Implicit Bias, White Privilege, Microaggressions" on its cover. As these terms imply, the book is a collection of short descriptions of incidents of racial violence and discrimination against Black Americans that took place throughout the U.S. between 2013 and 2016. Among the incidents documented in the book are the infamous cases of Tamir Rice and Michael Brown. By meticulously documenting acts of racial violence, *The Post-Racial Negro Green Book* not only rejects the notion of a post-racial United States, which gained currency in public discourse during the Obama presidency, but also alters the mission of its predecessor: whereas the original *Green Book* guide encouraged Black travel, proudly presented the achievements of Black entrepreneurs, and affirmed its belief in a better future, Miles's version shows that Black Americans' mobility, freedom, and safety continue to be limited. One may therefore say that Miles's book represents an inversion of the original *Green Book*. It also extends the idea of circumscribed travel by drawing attention to other forms of Black immobility—including, for example, the mass incarceration of people of color, the criminalization of Black mobile bodies, and the immobilizing effects of racism on Black individuals—and underscores the urgency of confronting these issues. It is likewise a call for action and seeks to mobilize people to counter the persistent forms of racism that affect the lived realities of African Americans today. As such, it continues the work of the *Green Book* travel guide, which inspired social and political change by encouraging Black Americans to travel on the basis of its information in an attempt to keep travelers safe and comfortable. The *Green Book* is a testament to the ways in which Black mobility was limited during segregation and, more importantly, to the forms of resistance against these circumscriptions. From a twenty-first-century perspective and in light of the enduring limitations and injustices that Black people experience, its significant role in the struggle for equality has grown even more pronounced.

Notes

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4 Mia Bay, "Traveling Black/Buying Black: Retail and Roadside Accommodations during the Segregation Era," in *Race and Retail: Consumption Across the Color Line*, ed. Mia Bay and Ann Fabian (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 22–24.

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11 See, for example, Bay, "Traveling Black/Buying Black" for an account of the difficulties that Black travelers confronted during segregation and consumption restrictions; see Seiler, "So That We" on the *Green Book*, Black mobility, citizenship, and Cold War culture.

12 Candacy Taylor, *Overground Railroad: The* Green Book *and the Roots of Black Travel in America* (New York: Abrams, 2020); Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, "Keep Going: African Americans on the Road in the Era of Jim Crow" (PhD diss., State University of New York-Al-

bany, 2009); Gretchen Sorin, *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights* (New York: Liveright, 2020); Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021), especially ch. 3. I completed this article prior to the publication of these important books and wish I would have had access to them while working on my article. I integrated some references to these books during the final stages of the publication process. If you would like to dig deeper into the role of the *Green Book*, please read the abovementioned works.

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Black Im/Mobilization, Critical Race Horror, and the New Jim Crow in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

Alexandra Hauke

Abstract

In the United States, people of color are not allowed to move around freely in spatial or social terms. Confronted with the everyday horrors of racial segregation, discrimination, and the legacies of slavery, African Americans continue to be excluded from opportunities of upward mobility and experience cultural displacement based on the immobilizing practices of what Michelle Alexander calls "the New Jim Crow." On-screen representations of Black individuals in the horror genre mirror this racial(ized) ideology. Many earlier horror films, texts Isabel Cristina Pinedo classifies as "race horror," mark them as ferocious monsters who must be villainized, imprisoned, or murdered and thus subscribe to a logic of race as the root of American fears. Jordan Peele's directorial debut *Get Out* (2017) provides a counter-argument, depicting racism as the primary horror in American (popular) culture by investing in the decolonizing strategies of critical race theory to uncover the very real horrors of the prison industrial complex, commodification of the Black body, and racial profiling. In this article, I read *Get Out* as an example of what I term "critical race horror," texts whose narrative, generic, and cinematographic strategies subvert essentialist strategies of racial silencing and thus invest in necessary measures toward (Black) mobility justice.

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Black Im/Mobilization, Critical Race Horror, and the New Jim Crow in Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

Alexandra Hauke

On February 7, 2019, video-on-demand service Shudder released its first original documentary feature titled *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror*, based on Robin R. Means Coleman's study *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (2011). Both texts examine the role of Blackness on screen and behind the camera in American popular culture by addressing historically controversial representations of African Americans in the horror genre. In the introduction to her book, Means Coleman reveals her motivation for interrogating the sociopolitical discourses that define the intersections between Blackness and horror: "In my effort to rehistoricize and recontextualize the horror film, I note how the genre 'speaks difference.' That is, marking Black people and culture as Other—apart from dominant (White) populations and cultures in the US" in spatial, social, political, and legal terms.[1] The documentary, directed by Xavier Neal-Burgin and co-written by Neal-Burgin and Ashlee Blackwell, takes up Means Coleman's critical aim in its poignant opening words: "Black history is Black horror."[2] Spoken by novelist and scholar Tananarive Due, who teaches Black horror and Afrofuturism at UCLA, this powerful premise establishes an often overlooked connection between the terrors that define both African American lives and the horror genre. Due's claim further testifies to the significance and topicality of the *Horror Noire* texts in the current political moment, predicated on a logic of "white-over-color ascendancy."[3]

The film consists largely of conversations with a number of actors and creators in the horror film industry, including William Crain (director of *Blacula* [1972]), Rusty Cundieff (director of *Tales from the Hood* [1995]), and Rachel True (who starred in *The Craft* [1996]). Actor, comedian, and filmmaker Jordan Peele stands out from this crowd for his talents in creating his 2017 directorial debut *Get Out*, whose the-

matic and political significance is underscored by the fact that *Horror Noire* begins and ends with conversations about this movie. When asked about the genesis of the documentary, Blackwell declared that "we thought that *Get Out* was this moment that we needed to capture in film but we also needed to tell the history that came before that."[4] By adapting Means Coleman's study to the screen in this way, Blackwell acknowledges the political power and critical potential of *Get Out*, which was awarded the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 2018, signaling "a renaissance," according to Peele, "the beginning of a movement, where the best films of every genre are being brought to me by my fellow black directors."[5]

The American movie industry thus seems to be at a turning point where both horror films and directors of color—two groups historically overlooked during awards season—are finally being recognized more regularly for their outstanding talents: *Get Out* as the most successful Black horror movie in film history and Jordan Peele as the first African American director to win an Academy Award in the aforementioned category have thus made history in an era during which "the current narrative on race [still] swirls around the unsustainability of race and the 'post-racial.'"[6] Critical discussions of racial erasure and colorblindness are thus at the thematic forefront of *Get Out*, a film that tackles White liberal racism and racialized violence in the spirit of influential social movements such as Black Lives Matter and scholarly initiatives like critical race theory, which ask pertinent questions echoing *Get Out*'s significant title: "*where* can black people go and *when* can they go there? This question is not only relevant for African Americans currently but also in their arduous history in America. The idea of black mobility has been a fundamental query since African Americans were brought to America as enslaved people" on ships across the Atlantic,[7] a process suggesting a simultaneous logic of mobility—rooted in the transoceanic journey from one locale to another—and immobility—signaled by the shackles of slavery prohibiting the Black captive from free movement. Despite the abolition of slavery in the United States, Black individuals are still subject to what Mimi Sheller calls "mobility regimes," systems defined by a

> constant policing of racial, gender, and sexual boundaries and mobilities [which] is fundamental to the founding of white power through the construction and empowerment of a specifically mobile, white, heteromasculine, national subject. And this power rests on the cooptation of others into supporting the dominant narratives of mobility as freedom which are embedded into Western fantasies, such as the open road, the inviting frontier, . . . or the thrill of acceleration.[8]

These unrealities have emerged from the grand narratives of the United States, national fictions told by dominant White bodies about other White agents all the while excluding marginalized voices. As such, representations of and stories told by Black groups about themselves are under constant erasure in American fiction, espe-

cially in the horror genre, which, according to Ian Olney, "in the United States remains a largely white enterprise."[9] In this context, *Get Out* speaks to centuries of Black inequality by re-narrating past and present Black horrors in ways that "do justice to the victims of racial violence" and "the history of oppression and systemic racism."[10] Due to the film's original content "communicat[ing] a collective truth of the African American experience,"[11] *Get Out*'s success "speaks difference" in a way that moves Black cinema into the (Afro)future and toward "mobility justice," targeting "'sustainability' issues but also includ[ing] many other extremes of inequality ranging from interpersonal bodily violence to global violations of human rights."[12] The debate about mobility justice is thus "a core political struggle, encompassing struggles over space, movement, and the relations of power that they enable or disrupt."[13]

While Peele purposefully screens Black immobilities by engaging in well-known images of imprisonment, the commodification of the Black body, and instances of racial profiling, he does so in an effort to expose the current lack of mobility justice for people of color and to set the scene for his protagonist, Chris Washington, to escape the historic fate of the Black character in horror films. No longer is the Black character the incarcerated murderer, the victim who dies first, or the token of Black monstrosity, and he does not need a White master to unchain him and grant him freedom. Rather, he is transformed from a static, voiceless, racially marked figure into a self-sufficient agent who must not apologize for or succumb to his past, but is allowed to be mobilized by it. Via Chris's journey, the film interrogates whether and how Black individuals can truly get out of a specifically American mobility regime, a confinement Michelle Alexander terms "the New Jim Crow," whereby mainstream American society serves as "a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow."[14] By carving out a space for specifically Black horror storytelling, *Get Out* exposes the uncomfortable realities of racism at the core of this system in an attempt to decolonize ways of thinking that define race as the root of American fears in horror fiction. Peele instead suggests racism as the true horror in American (popular) culture, which can only be countered by enabling his protagonist's escape and, in so doing, advocating for Black mobility justice. *Get Out* thus defies the mechanics of what Isabel Cristina Pinedo calls "race horror," movies that "explicitly code the monster as racial Other,"[15] and instead engages in strategies of narration, representation, and signification that echo contemporary critical race theorists. Through "counterstories," films such as *Get Out* thus "challenge, displace, or mock [the] pernicious narratives and beliefs" about people of color subsumed in a controlled collection of images across media and genres.[16]

In this article, I approach Jordan Peele's *Get Out* as a politically motivated rendition of such counter-storytelling, one that scrutinizes the intersection between race and

mobility, drawing attention to the possibilities and limitations of Black mobility and freedom. By reading the film through the lenses of critical race theory (CRT), Pinedo's concept of race horror, Alexander's notion of the New Jim Crow, and Sheller's idea of mobility justice, I will argue that *Get Out* is an iteration of what I term "critical race horror," a subgenre that intersects with practices of silencing, incarceration, and immobilization. By connecting the historic absence of Black individuals in the horror genre to the perils of systemic racism at the core of current U.S. race politics, I will suggest a trajectory toward Black mobility justice that finds representation in recent cultural productions, such as *Get Out*, whose eponymous message echoes the aim of critical race theory "to erase barriers to upward mobility for minority populations."[17] Ultimately, I suggest that critical race horror as genre engages significant emerging discourses around the intersecting categories of Black history and Black horror, countering racialized images of African Americans in fictional accounts that feed into the factual practices of mobility regimes. Reading upcoming Black horror films through the intersectional lens of critical race horror can thus enable scholars of American studies and beyond to foreground necessary measures facilitating a move from the criminalization of race to discussions of the horrors of racism.

Toward Black Mobility Justice

In a 2006 essay, Mimi Sheller and John Urry argue for a "new mobilities paradigm," which takes into account "multiple interacting mobilities" and "networks of connection" that look beyond a geographical logic of travel or transport and towards cultural-political understandings of mobility as part of a complex web of practices of inclusion and exclusion in communication, technology, and social interaction.[18] This theorization speaks to the significance of mobility research across disciplines and emphasizes the inherent link between mobility and intersecting social markers such as race, class, and gender. Access to space and rights to movement are thus tethered to questions of justice and control. As described earlier, mobility regimes or "colonial regimes of movement and the global mobilities that colonialism entailed" continue to affect "'backward' societies or 'primitive' peoples" in ways that keep them from advancing spatially and socially, thereby reserving the progress of upward mobility for privileged groups.[19]

Michelle Alexander's 2012 study *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* speaks to these discriminatory practices of supremacy, which make sure that Black individuals, in particular, are actively excluded from everyday discourses, narratives, and spaces that define processes of identity-making. Alexander reads mass incarceration in the United States as a mechanics of marginalization that forces African Americans into a kind of "segregated, second-class citizenship" or "growing undercaste" that has fallen victim to the multilayered system of the New

Jim Crow, which "locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls." The number of Black individuals—predominantly young men—who still come into contact with the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex under this immobility regime testifies to a shocking reality: "No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities," and yet, "there seems to be a lack of appreciation for the enormity of the crisis at hand." Mass incarceration and the public's neglect of its detrimental consequences have become what Alexander calls a "human rights nightmare," which is rooted in the historical issue of Black immobility.[20]

Spatial and social imprisonment thus hinders lower classes from upward social movement via the means of law or by moving them factually out of sight into what critical race theorist Elizabeth Iglesias calls "racial spaces," i.e., "artifacts of racial segregation" whose "existence raises fundamental questions about the relationship between racial inequality and the political and economic structures and processes of the neo-liberal political economy."[21] Racial spaces designate gaps between racially marked groups and the dominant society, whereby mobility between the two is either impossible or becomes a unilateral practice restricting non-White individuals from accessing the opportunities of the governing group. In this sense, African Americans emerge as victims of the "patterns of mobility and immobility that have been organized around the logic and historical practices of white supremacy—a logic in which . . . practices of racial segregation and discrimination have historically prevented, and continue today to prevent, the free movement of people."[22] When Alexander calls for a new radical social movement as the only meaningful way to break up this system and enable the establishment of a productive, egalitarian democracy, she echoes the political aspirations of critical race theorists to "understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" and to drastically alter "the vexed bond between law and racial power."[23]

In this sense, CRT enables scholars of American studies to make visible and discuss texts that purposefully expose these racist regimes and offer decolonizing accounts of individuals who talk back to their historic and current oppressors. Jordan Peele's *Get Out* as an example of such counter-storytelling starkly contrasts with the narrative strategies of earlier films, in which Black men are portrayed as sexual predators of White women, such as D.W. Griffith's infamous silent film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), or the exploitative race movies of the 1940s, for which all-Black casts were shamelessly used by White companies for the sake of making profit.[24]

Most prominently, however, *Get Out* defies the generic cornerstones of race horror films, which construct, criminalize, and stigmatize race in such a way that peo-

ple of color are permanently under scrutiny and face erasure in the horror genre. Means Coleman argues that what is missing from earlier films in the horror genre are productive and self-sufficient Black characters whose voices can be heard loud and clear among the undistinguished chatter of the White middle class and whose ability to inhabit and move between an unlimited number of social and geographical spaces defies the systemic injustices of American mobility regimes. The kind of "coerced mobility" suggested in race horror films is inextricably tied to the history of slavery, often at the thematic center of these texts, furthering Black immobility through the practices of "keeping people in chains, or on plantations, in barracks or locked in prisons, brothels, or bedrooms" in favor of the "sovereign power of 'mastery.'"[25] Sheller suggests that these practices of immobilization can only be countered through an investment in "subversive mobilities" as "a form of resistance against mobility regimes." Mobility justice thus cannot materialize as a one-dimensional state at a single moment in time but rather as an ongoing cultural process and amalgamation of political movements challenging the inequalities experienced by groups with limited access to means of movement. In line with the new mobilities paradigm, therefore, mobility justice must be read across "feminist, critical race, disabilities, and queer theory perspectives on corporeality, relationality, materiality, and accessibility" in order to grant these groups agency, sovereignty as well as freedom of choice and mobility—both in fictional accounts and the realities these stories are based on.[26]

Accordingly, race horror as a collection of cultural products invested in screening the histories, realities, and oppressive forces implicating Black bodies through the means of the horror genre is equally characterized by the mobility regimes set in place by the New Jim Crow. This is made visible, in part, by popular yet harmfully clichéd Black character archetypes in horror fiction established in adherence with U.S. national fantasies marking African Americans as dangerous monsters or racialized others: for example, the Black (male) perpetrator, the White (female) victim, and the White (male) savior; the Black-dude-dies-first trope; or the tortured slave who perishes during incarceration or is freed by the White hero.

My reading of *Get Out* as a counternarrative to these stereotypical tropes of immobilized subjects suggests a necessary turn toward the impact of CRT on race horror. The film's engagement in narrating the horrors of Black history as well as its legacies from the perspectives of people of color allows Peele's protagonist to outlive his White counterparts and survive the film's end, even if significantly violent means are necessary for this achievement, bringing about justice in racial, cultural, and spatial terms. The emergence of *Get Out* as critical race horror through its political potential thus relies on and simultaneously facilitates an approximation of subversive mobilities and Black mobility justice. The film does not excuse racial discrim-

ination by situating plot lines within supernatural frameworks or associating Black protagonists with African voodoo practices and magical killing rituals. Critical race horror explicitly avoids putting racism under erasure in favor of the alleged advances of the Obama era and thus speaks to but does not glorify the discriminatory notions of colorblindness and negrophilia. CRT ultimately allows critical race horror to liberate the histories of Blackness and Black horror from its marginalized positions in order to develop its respective texts as examples of unambiguously anticolonial storytelling prompted by the premises of Black mobilization facilitated by mobility justice. Ultimately, critical race horror is not only critical of essentialist notions of race and unequal access to (upward) mobility but also underlines the horror genre's potential to expose dominant ideologies by making controversial, dangerous scenarios—which viewers normally try to avoid—readily visible in detail.

In this context, *Get Out* as critical race horror performs a number of crucial functions in order to unveil present-day racism as the principal horror for African Americans in contemporary American culture and to carve out a space for Black mobility justice through Black mobilization: first, it makes use of metaphors of immobility, containment, and incarceration to comment on the realities of the prison industrial complex. Second, it invests in a punitive critique of White experimentation on commodified Black bodies to reveal the legacies of slavery in a neocolonial America. Third, it engages the tropes and aesthetics of the horror genre only to undermine its conventional structures and scrutinize the meanings of genre and generic filmmaking. Fourth, it rejects the position of the Black protagonist as the monstrous, racialized other and rewrites this character as an effective agent with the self-liberating ability to fully understand his precarious position by looking beyond post-racial White liberal façades, allowing him to escape his imprisonment and survive. Finally, *Get Out*, a film Peele felt "can't just be for black people" but whose "entire audience need to be served" in order to mobilize the masses,[27] encourages viewers to get out, start a conversation about racism, acknowledge that Black history is Black horror, and engage in necessary measures towards social, political, legal, and Black mobility justice.

Black Im/Mobilization in *Get Out*

Get Out opens with a dimly-lit sidewalk in a White suburban neighborhood, where chirping crickets and a barking dog are the only sounds breaking the uncomfortable silence of the mysterious setting. A young African American man steps onto the curb, searching for a friend's house while reporting to his partner on the phone that he feels like "a sore thumb" in the "creepy, confusing-ass suburb," which he does not regularly visit.[28] Through his nervous laughter and vigilant looks around the vicinity, the film transforms the familiarity of the idyllic suburban neighborhood into menacing territory, where this man's safety cannot be guaranteed because of his skin

color. His anxiety increases when he is approached by a white car; he reminds himself to "do nothing stupid," but then turns the other way in a supposedly inconspicuous attempt to escape the alarming situation. When he mutters to himself, "Not today, not me … you know how they like to do motherfuckers out here,"[29] the man implicitly references what are to him recognizable and frightening scenarios rooted in familiar Black tragedies: acts of racial profiling that consider the innocent Black bystander a violent perpetrator invading a White family neighborhood, thereby justifying police brutality, incarceration, or homicide.

His fear comes true, unfortunately, when he is attacked by the driver of the white car, falls unconscious in their chokehold, and is dragged into the car's trunk, invoking the essentialist Black-dude-dies-first trope in horror cinema. The assault is accompanied by the upbeat tones of cheery music that first emanate intradiegetically from the car and then flood the entire scene in an extradiegetic wave of juxtapositions between visual horror and auditory pleasure, underlining the process of estrangement experienced by the viewer. Peele strategically chooses comedy duo Flanagan and Allen's 1939 musical hall song "Run, Rabbit, Run" for this scene as the first warning of the film, echoing its eponymous title and cautioning its Black characters—and audiences—to get out before it is too late because "ev'ry Friday / On the farm, it's rabbit pie day / … Run rabbit, run rabbit, run, run, run / … Bang, bang, bang, bang goes the farmer's gun."[30]

In this scene, the film opens up the theme of im/mobility implied in its title through the ideas of abduction and escape by painting the Black man as a victim to the owner of the white car and simultaneously comparing him to an animal whose sly breakout tactics cannot save it from death or a life of imprisonment in a pet cage. The abductee's experience is thus paralleled with the practices of slavery: Peele substitutes the white car for the slave ship and transports the Black victim to a new location for the benefit, profit, and pleasure of his new White masters, as viewers will soon learn, preparing the film for the processes of commodification and captivity and introducing Chris's quest for mobility justice.

This intrinsic connection to Black history through images of slave transport is yet again supported musically, this time by a Swahili song entitled "Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga." The lyrics of this eerie piece translate to "Brother, / Listen to the ancestors. / Run! / You need to run far!" and serve as yet another warning directed at the Black victim.[31] The song flows into the film's opening credits and accompanies a tracking shot along an unidentified forest, seemingly from a moving car, suggesting the Black man's involuntary journey away from the suburb and into the unknown depths of the remote woods. *Get Out* invests from the outset in the use of cars as a means of transport to as well as from the horrifying center of the film's action and establishes the act of

driving as a mode of power on behalf of the respective driver.

The viewer subsequently meets protagonist Chris Washington in his New York City apartment, where he and his White girlfriend Rose Armitage are getting ready for a weekend at her parents' secluded countryside estate. Rose drives Chris away in her car: As they leave Chris's home, the camera mirrors the earlier tracking shot by moving along the identical forest rushing past outside Rose's car windows. The scene constitutes, therefore, a doubling of the film's opening and codes Rose as well as her brother Jeremy, who the viewer identifies as the driver of the white car in the initial abduction scene, as mobile slave-haulers ready to ship African American men to their parents for experimentation purposes. Rose's racist act is masked by a supposed gesture of love, namely introducing her boyfriend to her allegedly liberal parents. She promises Chris that her father "would've voted for Obama a third time if he could've [because] the love is so real."[32] Her parents are not racist, she says; otherwise, she would keep Chris away from them. Rose's choice of words is significant here; after all, she implicitly points to the fact that Chris's chance at upward mobility is contingent on her actions and that he would have to be kept away from them, not the other way around, in order not to cause trouble.

The couple's drive becomes an emblem of the film's themes of mobility and transportation, further reinforced by Chris's phone call with his best friend Rod, an agent for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at an unspecified airport. During their talk, the camera cuts back and forth between the rural and urban environments the two men find themselves in to visually establish the juxtaposition between the safe city and the dangerous countryside that later recurs. *Get Out* thereby challenges the setting of race horror films, namely urban environments, where "the monster is most likely to be constituted as a racial Other" because "racial minorities are concentrated in the de facto system of racial segregation that operates in the United States," which is most prominent in city centers.[33] The film's mirrored abduction scenes, defined by Peele's strategic choice to move the horror out of the city and back into a more rural space, namely Upstate New York, thus confronts viewers with the workings of racism in remote spaces where racial discrimination will soon emerge as even more deep-seated than in New York City. Chris is thus robbed of his freedom of mobility because of his placement in a surrounding cut off from cell phone service, accessible transport, and the mobile bustle of urbanity.

Rod addresses this hazard when he warns Chris not to go to "a White girl's parents' house," a point at which the viewer does not yet suspect the Armitages' plans because of Rose's gentle exterior and caring sentiment toward Chris.[34] Her role as

the driver in power is soon undercut, however, when she hits a deer on the way to the Armitage estate and is forced to call the police to report the accident. Her well-played façade as defender of racial equality is put to the test when the White police officer called to the scene asks for Chris's driver's license despite his sole position as an innocent passenger. Rose calls the cop's lame attempt at racial profiling "bullshit," making the officer painfully aware of the casual racism underneath his actions.[35] Critical race theorist Karen S. Glover observes that the "targeting of people of color by law and law enforcement is an American tradition" that indicates an "emphasis on the regulation of the body and social space." She continues that the "commonsense nature of racial profiling that underlies the *rational discrimination* argument suggests that targeting young males of color makes sense given the hue of the criminal justice system."[36] The officer in *Get Out* justifies his behavior by hiding behind the very tradition engraved in law enforcement that "any time there is an incident, we have every right to ask" for involved parties' IDs,[37] targeting Chris because of his skin color in a straightforward "white logic orientation."[38] The viewer understands that the inherent threat of such practices code any environment as potentially dangerous for non-White individuals at any point in time, signaling, as Hagar Kotef argues, that "space becomes political via the movements it allows and prevents, and the relations that are formed or prevented via these im/mobilities."[39]

What this shows is that racial profiling as a commonly executed form of discrimination, especially "racial disparity in traffic stops" as part of "the tradition of racialized law in the United States," limits the Black individual's rights to move freely towards his destination in *Get Out*.[40] "Movement thereby becomes primary within the anatomy of political spheres," marking Black people as subjects whose means and facilities to be mobile are always contingent on and tethered to the governing entity.[41] The politics of this American mobility regime not only comment on the importance of transport justice, whereby access to means of transportation is made accessible to all people, but also make visible "the ways in which uneven mobilities produce differentially enabled (or disabled) subjects and differentially enabling (or disabling) spaces."[42] Mobility justice must thus engender discussions about understandings of transportation as more than questions of access but rather as a comprehensive paradigm predicated on a "mobile ontology," which "brings into play historical bodily relations, ecological relations, and wider global relations that inform the political arena."[43]

Get Out negotiates ways of enabling and restricting spatial and social mobilities through the (re)attribution of the ability to drive and the possibility of purposefully driving cars, on the one hand, and through the (re)assignment of the privilege of climbing the social ladder according to falsely justified ideas of colorblindness, on the other. The film's ontology of im/mobility thus relies on the histories of slave

ships as cargo, of plantations as prisons and labor factories, and of slave workers as inferior, racialized, and abused subjects with simultaneously glorified bodies ready for commodification. In *Get Out*, representations of these notions include Jeremy's and Rose's vehicles well as the limousines taking the Armitages' wealthy friends to their annual summer party, where a supposedly innocent game of bingo soon turns into a competitive slave auction for Chris's body. Furthermore, the Armitage mansion resembles the size, structure, and overall design of a seventeenth-century cash-crop plantation, where Chris meets not only Rose's parents, Dean and Missy, but also their African American help, Georgina and Walter, whose roles as house- and groundskeeper point toward their slave-master relationships with the Armitages.

Dean's attempted explanation of these power dynamics does little to relieve Chris of his suspicions about the family's attitude toward people of color despite their welcoming charades: "I know what you're thinking. . . . White family, Black servants. It's a total cliché. We hired Georgina and Walter to help care for my parents. . . . But, boy, I hate the way it looks."[44] While, at first, Dean attempts to downplay the controversy of his pseudo-liberal actions, the viewer soon understands that when he claims to have "kept a piece of [his mother] in the kitchen," he literally means Georgina.[45]

In a horrifying twist of events, Dean turns out to be a neurosurgeon, whose father figured out a way to transplant White brains into Black bodies all the while keeping White existence alive and in command of the Black form. In order to maintain a working connection between body and mind, a small piece of Black consciousness is trapped during the operation in the deepest part of the brain—a bottomless, black hole called "the sunken place"—through the means of Missy's hypnosis techniques. The transplant, a procedure the Armitages call "the Coagula" (a play on the term coagulation meaning transformation from one state to another) enables those men in the film whose White body is sick, disabled, or lacking a particular physical ability to become the owners of what they believe are genetically superior, sexually desirable, unbreakable, Black male bodies. When Chris is knocked unconscious and strapped to an armchair in the Armitages' basement in preparation for his Coagula, a pre-recorded speech of Dean's father Roman explains the community's aspirations:

> You have been chosen because of the physical advantages you have enjoyed your entire lifetime. With your natural gifts and our determination, we could both be part of something greater. . . . The Coagula procedure is a man-made miracle. Our order has been developing it for many, many years . . .. My family and I are honored to offer it as a service to members of our group. Don't waste your strength, don't try to fight it. You can't stop the inevitable. . . . Behold, the Coagula.[46]

At this point in the film, Peele's invocation of slavery, commodification, and negro-

philia through the medical procedure speak to notions of im/mobility in explicit terms: by moving a supposedly "White brain" into a Black body, Dean grants the formerly inferior and racially coded subject the opportunity of upward social mobility. Black skin and bodily characteristics subsequently become tokens of an inherently White supremacy, enabling the members of this exclusive group to revel in their post-racial and thus supposedly liberal attitudes toward African Americans. Iman Cooper explains that "as a result of commodification, black bodies were rendered disciplined subjects; beholden to the will of the white men" whose "individual choices to capture, buy, and trade African slaves created a societal structure that equalized the value of human life with a market value."[47] This value is rationalized in *Get Out* through positive discrimination, exemplified in the passage above by the terrorizing practices of a bizarre cult. Roman's confession speaks to the fact that "instead of being valued for the contributions they could make to a society," in Chris's case as a photographer, as slaves, "human beings became a means to an end—a means of furthering one's personal agenda and upward social mobility."[48] While during the transatlantic slave trade, White ownership of Black bodies emerged as an opportunity to advance one's social status, financial superiority, and hierarchical power, in *Get Out*, the White characters circumvent moving down the social ladder to an inferior Black position by keeping to their own small community, where all members are informed about the Coagula and accept the transformed Black men because of their White cores.

In this scene, the film not only speaks directly to Alexander's notion of the New Jim Crow by masking systemic racism in a new form of slavery and segregation, made possible by the imprisoning practices of the sunken place as the core strategy of the Armitages' mobility regime; it also approaches the Black individual as a victim of sexual exploitation, robbed of the ability to decide not only where but also how, for, and with whom they want to move their bodies. A young Black party guest who was coagulated from André Hayworth, the man abducted by the white car at the beginning of the film, into Logan King, husband to the much older Philomena King, testifies to the advantages and drawbacks of being Black in the modern world: "I find that the African American experience for me has been, for the most part, very good. Although I find it difficult to go into detail as I haven't had much of a desire to leave the house in a while," leaving his wife speechless at his confession of their newfound sexual passion.[49] Philomena's profit from having a much younger, sexually active, and physically upgraded husband thus lies in his athletic inclination, an asset the Armitage cult traces to André as Logan's Black predecessor.

Stripped of the ability to command his body, André is forcefully prohibited from providing consent to Logan's sexual advances towards Philomena. Thomas A. Foster observes that many scholars "have suggested that rape can serve as a metaphor for enslavement," which, in turn, signifies incarceration, whereby slavery and its

many tolls serve as a prison. He further claims that while many cases of sexual abuse against female slaves have been discussed in historical documents and scholarly studies, "black manhood under slavery was also violated in . . . ways that are less easily spoken of (then and now)." These instances of rape against Black male slaves "have been hidden in plain sight," much like André is forced to endure his abuse as an immobilized subject stuck in the sunken place via the public cover-up constituted by Philomena's and Logan's explicit desire.[50] André even has to watch Logan's every move through his appropriated body's eyes, forcefully participating in the couple's sex life as a voyeur without any agency to escape or look away. As such, fetishization of the Black male body coexists alongside the repulsion of Black existence; André's body is thus the ultimate object of White desire while his social position as a Black individual is simultaneously punished by infinite incarceration. As Foster concludes, "Without recognizing male sexual abuse, we run the risk of reinscribing the very stereotypes used by white slave owners and others who reduced black to bestial sexual predators and white women to passionless and passive vessels."[51]

Get Out exposes the other side of this essentialist coin, narrating sexual exploitation of Black male slaves and their immobilization in social, political, and bodily terms through the sunken place as an allegory of the prison industrial complex, whereby space and the bodies it confines become markers of structural and physical violence. Philomena's middle-class status in the community can only be upheld through the disposal of Logan's former White body and replacing it with André's much more desirable form. The system informing this idea emerges as one in which "the black body [is] rendered valuable only in the economic sense, rather than any other social markers of value."[52] Upward mobility is thus directly connected to this newly envisioned version of slave culture, ironically immobilizing coagulated individuals to the degree that they must remain confined to the social spaces of their community to avoid detection by the outside world. The Armitages' cult is thus kept intact through a particularly gruesome form of "embodied agency," whereby certain "capabilities for mobility are deeply tied up with the production of white masculinity."[53] Through the Coagula, this White masculinity becomes inextricably tied to its Black counterpart—that is, the Black male body becomes mobile while Black consciousness is rendered immobile, resulting in falsely celebrated forms of racial and mobility justice on behalf of the cult. By contrast, Dean's medical procedures put physical models of White masculinity under erasure in the community without, however, surrendering the socio-cultural powers and privileges of White middle-classism. The Black male body can consequently only thrive when conducted by implanted White epistemologies, the film's ultimate testament to the realities of the master-slave relationship, whereby the Black slave carries out physical labor under supervision of the White master's command.

This unjust, contradictory, and controversial distribution of power in the context of mobile bodies, bodily movements, and social mobilities speaks to notions of embodied agency that perpetuate practices of systemic racism and Black bodily exploitation across social, political, sexual, and medical intersections. After all, the White master acknowledges his own physical inferiority and mobilizes his intellectual supremacy by making use of Black corporeal superiority. In this sense, all "histories of slavery and anti-slavery, colonialism and anti-colonialism, are also histories of mobilities of various kinds of labor, capital, commodities, natures, and cultures."[54] Through the Coagula, these histories remain present realities and the practices of the New Jim Crow can go almost entirely unnoticed beneath a thin veneer of pretense, avoidance, and denial.

At the same time, Chris's escape from the ties of these practices is enabled by current materialities of this historically connoted system. Strapped to the leather armchair in the Armitage basement, physically immobilized and forced to wait for the Coagula, Chris's nervous habit to claw at the armrests results in the exposure of the recliner's innards, which turn out to be cotton. In order to resist Missy's hypnotic manipulation rendering her victims complacent to the procedure, Chris stuffs pieces of cotton in his ears in an off-camera moment, allowing him to cut himself free from his shackles and to knock Jeremy, Dean's medical assistant, unconscious unexpectedly. Picking cotton, a direct reference to the histories of slave labor on plantations, is thus employed as the subversive strategy that enables the Black protagonist's mobilization in a manner of talking back to the colonizer and past Black horrors. Chris thus embraces Black history and turns it against the White masters.

At this point, the film reverts to the use of cars as a means of transportation. This time, however, Chris is ready to escape from the Armitage mansion and takes the wheel himself. In a reversal of his abduction by Rose, the protagonist is able to steer the allegorical slave ship towards the front gates of the estate during the final showdown towards mobility justice. When Chris is momentarily brought to a halt by Georgina, he crashes the car into a tree and is forced to continue his exit on foot while Rose threatens him with a shotgun. Closer to getting out than ever before, Chris has to overcome the final obstacle of battling Rose on the ground before the viewer is alerted to a siren-wailing and blue-light-flashing car in the style of a police vehicle, a moment when all hope for the innocent Black protagonist's freedom is lost. As Chris leans over Rose, his hands automatically shoot up in a defensive stance and Rose croaks for help at the supposed officer. Her invoked position of White victimhood at the mercy of the Black offender is in vain, however, for the approaching authority turns out to be Chris's friend Rod in his TSA car. As Rose succumbs to her injuries and the two men leave the plantation, the film inverts its earlier scenes of slave transport and thus invests in the practices of subversive mobilities, whereby Chris is

finally granted mobility justice and a chance at life outside the Armitages' racialized mobility regime.

Sheller argues that "differential capabilities for movement affect what it means to be human and the ways in which people form mobile subjectivities such as the 'free man' or the 'slave girl,' the 'driver' or the 'footman,' the 'athlete' or the 'crip.'"[55] When Chris understands his precarious position as a soon-to-be slave, his will to survive allows him to become both a driver and a free man who takes matters into his own hands for a chance at self-mobilization. His friend Rod's employment with the TSA and agency as a driver support this endeavor: because he is quite literally in charge of controlling transport and movement, Rod ultimately facilitates the drive back to the safety of urbanity and thus the film's investment in Black mobility justice.[56]

Get Out has thus set the scene for a multilayered discussion of class privilege through scrutinizing a variety of spatial and social mobilities: unequal forms of transport and traffic justice, varying degrees of mobility access, the historical dimensions of im/mobility during slavery and its aftermath, and the alleged perks of upward mobility. The film comments on the obstruction of Black mobilities through the practices of American mobility regimes, framed by the racial spaces of literal and metaphorical prisons, whereby social and political justice as well as the freedom of movement for African Americans continues to be restricted. Sheller emphasizes "the over policing of those 'driving while black'" as a major reason for ongoing mobility injustices, including the harsh stigmatization of people of color as individuals who move through the streets at their own risk of being stopped, incarcerated, or killed.[57]

Chris's and Rod's final exchange in *Get Out* once again frames the film by the idea of subversive mobilities suggested by Sheller:

> Chris: How did you find me?
> Rod: I'm TS-motherfucking-A. We handle shit. It's what we do. Consider this situation fucking handled.

While Rod's response invokes the film's overall use of dark humor, his emphasis on his profession as an agent of transport security and the significance of their problem-solving abilities offers a final commentary on the racialized mobility regimes oppressing the Black characters in the film. While driving his TSA car to the country for personal matters arguably violates his job description, Rod is left no other choice after his plea to investigate Chris's and André's disappearances is ridiculed by New York detectives. *Get Out* thus scrutinizes the practices of law enforcement officials by juxtaposing the traffic officer's unjustified and arguably racist treatment of Chris's involvement in the accident earlier in the film with the mockingly blasé attitude of the investigators during an actual moment of crisis. Rod's effort at vigilante justice to counter the ironic failure of the justice system ultimately saves Chris from

infinite captivity, whereby the film both offers and becomes informed by discourses of transport justice and Black mobility justice.

Get Out and Critical Race Horror

As mentioned earlier, the film's engagement in achieving mobility justice as well as racial justice for the protagonist is inextricably linked to questions of genre. I have already explored *Get Out*'s potential as a counternarrative in the tradition of CRT, challenging and rewriting racialized, stigmatized, and harmful images of people of color in an attempt to reinscribe character archetypes with new productive meanings. In the context of horror fiction, these subversive strategies allow for a reading of *Get Out* as critical race horror, a subgenre that exposes racism as the cause of horror for Black individuals, thereby denying race as a monstrous category and defying the criminalization of the Black subject in favor of the White hero. Critical race horror mobilizes the Black subject by building worlds in which people of color are allowed to survive the film's end by challenging or escaping from states of incarceration that inhibit their freedom and mobility justice.

In this sense, critical race horror is in stark contrast to race horror films, which "rely on the familiar equation of savagery with third-world peoples in a thinly-veiled expression of racism."[59] Such texts "estrange danger by introducing a dark and ancient religion," one Pinedo calls "magical religion," whereby the racialized monster "is associated with the religion, be it as a follower or a god."[60] *Get Out* avoids religious as well as specifically African imagery altogether, not least because of Jordan Peele's call to steer clear of voodoo melodies in the composition of the film's score. The track "Sikiliza Kwa Wahenga," advising Chris to listen to the ancestors, features

> distinctly black voices and black musical references . . .. African-American music tends to have, at the very least, a glimmer of hope to it—sometimes full-fledged hope. I wanted Michael Abels . . . to create something that felt like it lived in this absence of hope but still had [black roots]. And I said to him, "You have to avoid voodoo sounds, too."[61]

The director's demand to refrain from racialized depictions of people of color speaks to the importance of an increase in Black cultural production; after all, counter-stories to colonized narratives show immense political potential when told from the perspective of those affected by the respective stigmatized images. Peele's comment suggests that his film does not engage with but rather views critically the essentialist habit of identifying Black people with exotic practices, traditions, and hymns as well as uncivilized folks, environments, and lifestyles. Instead, *Get Out* focuses on the significance of Black history for the protagonist's present-day struggles with American race politics and well-disguised White liberal racism by allowing him to defy char-

acterizations of the Black savage emerging from the backwoods.

Although Chris eventually uses his awareness of his perilous position within this system to his advantage, he cannot be portrayed as a hero initially. In race horror, "the hero is likely to be a white male associated with the police or science, sometimes both, . . . one who comes to believe in the efficacy of magic."[62] Dean Armitage speaks directly to this generic convention: a successful, rich, White neurosurgeon, his role resembles that of a number of doctors in earlier horror films, whose aspirations eventually turn awry. While there is no magic involved in *Get Out*, Dean's ascribed heroism stems from his seeming ability to make the impossible possible for his community—much like magic would. The viewer, at the same time, continues to hope for Chris's survival and thus his emergence as the true hero of the story. While "in race horror the hero is assisted in coming to believe by consulting books on the occult or an expert informant, usually a university professor who has studied the religion,"[63] Chris is ultimately rescued by Rod, who remains unassociated with these areas and is even ridiculed by the police for suggesting that the Armitages "have been abducting Black people, brainwashing them, and making them work for them as sex slaves."[64] Rod serves as an amateur sleuth who is allowed to follow his impulses and let himself be led by his earlier experiences with racism at the hands of White individuals to save his best friend sans external help. It remains clear, however, that both men will not be exempt from racial discrimination in the future and can thus never act as heroes of the story in the way a conventional White survivor in a horror tale would. As such, while "in race horror the hero usually triumphs,"[65] in critical race horror, the protagonist's defeat of the White master and escape from the slave plantation is only a provisional victory.

Get Out thus approximates race horror only when Pinedo suggests that "the ending is left open for further disruptions of the everyday world."[66] Chris's inevitable strategy to murder each member of the Armitage family on his way out before they slaughter him is thus a necessary measure of the horror genre, one that initially suggests the revenge practice of beating the master at his own game. Chris's brutal actions are immediately undermined, however, when he cannot bring himself to kill Rose during the final showdown. *Get Out* thereby saves the protagonist from a position of Black monstrosity by rooting his actions in self-defense and enabling him to get out before he is forced into captivity and forever immobilized.

Conclusion

Get Out's final tease, which briefly suggests an unjust end for Chris before the revolutionary turn of events, speaks not only to the controversial history of Black horror cinema, laden with images of Black death before the closing credits, but also to the

film's success in following the efforts of CRT "to intervene in the ideological contestation of race in America, and to create, new oppositionist accounts of race."[67] By acknowledging racism as the true horror of the past and present U.S. cultural scene and liberating the Black lead from the sunken place of American horror filmmaking, *Get Out* cuts across the immobilizing practices of race horror storytelling and of de-narrating the Black horrors of slavery, commodification, abuse, and incarceration. Peele's film thus combats the American post-racial lie at the heart of the New Jim Crow by engaging in critical race theory as a practice of "counter-mobilization" to highlight the casual dimensions of racism outside concentric urban contexts,[68] where personal microaggressions tease out the repercussions of slavery in suburban racial spaces.

By working towards Black mobility justice through the decolonizing techniques of critical race horror, *Get Out* supports Alexander's plea for a "new social consensus [that] must be forged about race and the role of race in defining the basic structure of our society, if we hope ever to abolish the New Jim Crow. This new consensus must begin with dialogue, a conversation that fosters a critical consciousness, a key prerequisite to effective social action." Her call for revolution is "an attempt to ensure that the conversation does not end with nervous laughter."[69] Jordan Peele's critical race horror film *Get Out* similarly warrants that the viewer's nervous laughter at the terrifying plot absurdities, instances of Black comedy, and unexpected inversions of generic horror tropes throughout the movie are only the beginning of a difficult and uncomfortable yet pertinent conversation about the realities of the mobility regime that is the New Jim Crow in the contemporary United States. Any hope of a genuine, long-term move from post-race to Afro-future, from historical immobilities to "alternative mobility futures" and from race horror to critical race horror is thus predicated on one crucial measure: to get racism out of the White house.[70]

Notes

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11 Due, "Jordan Peele."

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42 Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 28.

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50 Thomas A. Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (2011): 445, 446, 448, DOI: 10.1353/sex.2011.0059.

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52 Cooper, "Commodification of the Black Body," 25.

53 Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 52.

54 Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 39–40.

55 Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 47.

56 Initially, *Get Out* featured a very different ending: Chris is arrested by police officers before the camera cuts to six months later, when Rod visits him in prison. In the director's commentary, Peele states that his "movie was meant to call out the fact that racism is still simmering underneath the surface, so this ending to the movie, felt like it was the gut punch that the world needed, as something about it rings very true." Hannah Mylrea, "Oscar-Winner *Get Out* Almost Had a Completely Different Ending," *NME*, March 5, 2018, https://www.nme.com/blogs/the-movies-blog/get-out-alternate-ending-2254624. However, as Daniel Kaluuya, the actor playing Chris, has since noted about the new and current ending, "Rod saves him through the black brotherhood—and also, Chris has a life, you know? He has to go out there even after he's experienced all this

racism, and people expect you to see the world in the same way when they haven't experienced something like that. I thought that was really honest." Adam Chitwood, "*Get Out* Filmmakers Explain Why They Changed the Ending," *Collider*, February 22, 2018, https://collider.com/get-out-alternate-ending-explained/. In this sense, the original, now alternative, ending speaks in very straightforward ways to audiences' expectations of a black man's doom in the United States because of appearances. At the same time, it plays into processes of immobilization at the core of Alexander's idea of the New Jim Crow; as such, while it mirrors Black realities, it can also be read as tapping into racialized stereotypes. The current ending, however, not only offers release in a humoristic way, it also points towards the actively anti-racist potentials of Black horror cinema at large and critical race horror in particular. Chris escapes through his own means before he is rescued by Rod, a fellow Black man: ultimately, there is no need for White saviorism in *Get Out*, but there is space for Black solidarity.

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68 Crenshaw et al., "Introduction," xxii.

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70 Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 18.

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"The Beast from the East"

Mental Dis/Ability and the Fears of Post-Socialist Mobility in North American Popular Culture

Katharina Wiedlack

Abstract

This article analyzes characters in North American popular culture who migrated from the post-socialist world to the United States and other Western countries. It focuses on the Anglo-Ukrainian clone Helena in the television show *Orphan Black* (Space/BBC America, 2013–2017), the Russian girl Esther in the horror movie *Orphan* (2009), and the psychopathic Russian assassin Villanelle in the television show *Killing Eve* (BBC America, 2018–2022). All these fictional characters are orphans. Moreover, they all share the same pathology: a mental disorder or disability that predestines them to become ruthless killers. I argue that the fictional killers embody North American fears surrounding the mobility of the Cold War Other in the aftermath of the fall of the so-called Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

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"The Beast from the East"

Mental Dis/Ability and the Fears of Post-Socialist Mobility in North American Popular Culture

Katharina Wiedlack

Meteorologists dubbed the threatening cold weather front that was about to hit Great Britain and Ireland in February 2018 "The Beast from the East."[1] I use the metaphor playfully as title for my analysis of three fictional post-socialist immigrant characters from television shows and cinema, for their arrival in North American popular culture created an equally chilling sensation, promising violence and destruction to normative Western (fictional) societies.

I focus on three popular characters that are representative for the most visible configurations of the embodiment of North American fears around mobility in the aftermath of the fall of the so-called Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union: the Anglo-Ukrainian clone Helena from the Canadian television show *Orphan Black* (Space/BBC America, 2013–2017), the Russian girl Esther in the U.S.-American horror movie and film script *Orphan* (2009), and the psychopathic Russian assassin Villanelle of the British television show *Killing Eve* (BBC America, 2018–2022). I include *Killing Eve* in my analysis of North American popular culture, since the show was produced for the North American market and features a North American actress in the lead role—Sandra Oh. I argue that these characters represent post-socialist mobility as the threat of corrupting or even destroying Western societies. The danger derives from the post-Soviet heritage that made them orphans, as well as from sharing a mental disorder or condition that predestines them to become ruthless killers. What amplifies their dangerousness further is that their pathology is not visible. Their able bodies and their whiteness allow them to "blend in" and move undetected in white-dominated (racist) Western societies. To save Western societies, the post-Soviet bodies have to become immobile. Interestingly, this de- or immobilization allows female heroines to emerge as main characters in the television-show and cinema examples discussed in my article.

I read these three popular culture examples of the embodiment of post-socialist mobility through a cripistemological lens, whose methodology emerged at the intersection of critical dis/ability and queer theory. Merri Johnson and Robert McRuer use the term "cripistemology" to signify that "thought and knowledge in twenty-first-century Western culture as a whole is structured—indeed, fractured—by an endemic crisis of ability and disability."[2] They developed their concept in dialogue with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), which had claimed a primary position for fears around homosexuality at the core of nineteenth- and twentieth-century knowledge.[3] Accordingly, cripistemology privileges notions of dis/ability as their primary research interest. Johnson and McRuer understand dis/ability as constructed through various axes of oppression, compulsory able-bodiedness, heteronormativity, and racialization and use "crip" (an appropriation of the derogatory word "crip" by people with disabilities) as affirmative, yet provocative term to signify non-normativity.[4]

Following their approach, and adding neoliberal homonormativity to the list of oppressive forces that structure our knowledge, I want to find out how the crisis of dis/ability informs or co-constructs issues of post-socialist mobility in contemporary post-Cold War North American societies and vice versa. I build on scholars working at the intersections of mobility and critical dis/ability studies, who point out that access to mobility, in both the metaphorical and literal sense, is unequally distributed, and structured through white North/Western hegemony.[5] Zygmunt Bauman observed the "global hierarchy of mobility" to describe the emergent power structures that stratify and mediate social exclusion on a global scale since the end of the twentieth century.[6] Although Bauman did not explicitly identify "compulsory able-bodiedness" as part of this process,[7] historians such as Douglas Baynton and Penny L. Richards have done so.[8] They have shown that people with dis/abilities have not only historically been restricted from cross-border mobility, but also that immigration policies frequently used notions of dis/ability to create images of undesirable immigrants.

Based on these findings from mobility and critical dis/ability studies, and referring to the critical race and gender studies scholar Mel Chen,[9] I will ask what it means if different notions—the notions of post-socialist mobility, the orphan, the mentally dis/abled, the sexually traumatized/sexually non-normative—inform one another. Focusing on mental dis/ability at the intersection of geographical and temporal mobility, I will show how the post-socialist orphan materializes as a medicalized, sexualized, and ethnic trope that contains notions of hyperintelligence and arrested development, among others.

I argue that the psychopathic post-socialist orphan can be understood as the twenty-first-century version of much older fears of East–West mobility that

emerged when the previously stable and seemingly impermeable border between the West and East became fluid. In their current version, earlier anxieties about "a flood of immigrants and refugees" to the West merged the undesired migrant with the historic fear-mongering fictional figure of the orphan—whose threat in these formations is exacerbated by their mental disabilities in combination with aggressive (homo)sexuality.[10] I use the term "post-socialist" to locate the origins of the fictional characters discussed in this article, rather than their nationality. I prefer this terminology because it emphasizes the undifferentiated gaze at post-socialist heritage in North American popular culture that mostly universalizes the cultural heritage of the broad territory of the so-called "former Eastern Bloc," including Eurasian post-Soviet spaces.

The Russian orphan has been part of North American epistemologies since the Russian Revolution. Analyzing feminist, Quaker, and Social Gospel humanitarian discourses between 1917 and 1933, the historian Julia Mickenberg shows the crucial role Soviet orphans and their adoption played in public debates aiming to form a U.S. national identity that feels responsibility for the positive development of the world.[11] U.S. media attention to post-socialist orphans spiked with the collapse of the communist bloc. From 1989 on, American news magazines on television and in print media began to report on the plight of an estimated 500,000 Romanian orphans as well as on the Soviet Russian orphans.[12] As the Soviet Union collapsed, the orphan population in institutions alone was around 300,000,[13] due to poverty, alcoholism, ethnic conflict, and HIV/AIDS. Reports emphasized the dire conditions of these orphans. Covering adoptions by American families, they increasingly focused on unexpected problems the new parents had to encounter with their often traumatized adopted children.[14] Media emphasized that the children, due to neglect or as a result of their birth parents' drug consumption, "suffer[ed] from serious mental disorders," showed "significant attachment disorders, or seriously problematic behavior," "brain injury and mental retardation[, and] post traumatic stress disorder."[15] Moreover, and in relation to that, they frequently showed extremely violent behavior. American studies scholar Claudia Sadowski-Smith argues that "US coverage of adoptions from the former Soviet Union [frequently] highlighted adoption failures . . . [,] emphasizing the adoptees' mental and behavioral issues. [Moreover, p]ublications on Eastern European adoptees tend to employ medical or psychological perspectives to focus on adoptee disorders," often revolving around individual cases of adopted children with personality and posttraumatic disorders.[16]

In what follows, I will locate the fictional psychopathic post-socialist orphan within the North American epistemology of post-socialist spheres and people. I will show how the individual figures' narratives create post-socialist mobility as threat to American society by drawing on ideas of the post-socialist space as a space of sexual

exploitation and trauma. Finally, I will explain how they support female heroines as defenders of (multicultural) North American societies.

North American Epistemologies of Post-Socialist Delay and Backwardness

Orphans as a literary and cultural trope signify a threat to white Western societies that can be easily attached to any cultural Other, hence is not specific to the post-socialist one. Part of this threat is their construction as figures without family, and without a place of belonging. Historically, orphans were seen as fluid and mobile characters, deprived of a sense of responsibility, moving across regions and countries.[17] The post-socialist orphan adds two threatening dimensions, mobilizing historical knowledge around post-socialist spaces and people as geopolitical threats to the "American way of life,"[18] and knowledge about the possible consequences of traumatic experiences as children. The clone Helena in Orphan Black, the child Esther in Orphan, and the assassin Villanelle in Killing Eve are just three examples of fictional post-socialist orphan characters with varying degrees of mental disorders and pathological character traits that started emerging after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Helena, Esther, and Villanelle embody North American fears around post-socialist subjects, circulating in popular culture and carrying notions of mental dis/ability as a post-traumatic post-socialist condition. These characters connect ideas around the dis/ability figure of the psycho-killer to the epistemologies of the post-socialist immigrant orphan, as well as other fears around post-socialist mobility, such as sex trafficking and organized crime.

Neither the figure of the pathological killer nor any of these traumatic experiences is culturally post-socialist per se. Critical dis/ability scholars have analyzed the long history of problematic dis/ability representations in film.[19] Especially figures in horror movies, thrillers, and crime stories represent dis/ability in a stigmatizing fashion.[20] These genres build on fears surrounding "spectacular disability," as they connect bodily and mental non-normativity to monstrosity, excessive sexuality, and sadomasochism while trying to elicit the emotional reactions of fright and disgust in order to call for the other's annihilation.[21]

I am especially interested in how ideas of post-socialist mobility intersect with ideas of (mental) dis/ability. I argue that the different notions of dis/ability and fears around post-socialist mobility often intersect in the longstanding Western notion of Eastern Europe and Eurasia as backward and/or developmentally delayed. American popular culture scholars such as Eliot Borenstein, Kimberly Williams, and myself have analyzed a trend in figures that represent post-socialist backwardness and developmental delay after the end of the Cold War.[22] They appear in comedies as

the post-socialist "yokel" who, "clinging to folkways and quaint but highly inappropriate behavior, [represents] the quintessence of foreign backwardness, to which no amount of goodwill or diplomacy can accord true subjectivity."[23] They also populate entertainment media as beautiful and naïve young women whose bodies and minds are not yet corrupted by the worst of capitalism.[24] The backwardness of these figures derives from the idea that the successor states of the Soviet Union were politically, economically, socially, and culturally developmentally stuck. In her exhaustive analysis of U.S. government discourses on Russia, Williams shows that 1990s officials, analysts, and political commentators understood the socialist period as "backward and frightening age" that forced Eastern Europe into a pre-Revolutionary state, when ideas about democratic nationhood and citizenship were still in the fledgling stage.[25] They saw the citizens of the new countries as "orphans of communism," and described Russia as not-yet developed or underdeveloped, using notions of orphanhood.[26]

A similar overlap, or indeed co-construction, of the idea that the post-socialist individual is stuck in an earlier time, and the figure of the orphan can frequently be found in American popular culture. The orphan Esther in *Orphan* is a good example of how fictional characters embody notions of post-socialist backwardness.[27] The white American upper-middle-class couple Kate and John Coleman meet the Russian orphan for the first time in a Catholic orphanage. This place looks temporally displaced, as if the characters had traveled back in time to the Victorian age. More importantly, the mere existence of such an orphanage is out of time, since U.S. government policy started focusing on foster care and group homes in the second half of the twentieth century,[28] and today's boarding schools and adoption agencies are modern institutions that do not look like the orphanage in *Orphan*. Corresponding to the Victorian orphanage, however, are Esther's nineteenth-century doll outfit, her white porcelain complexion, dark braided hair, and her various accessories, which stand in stark contrast to the modern and casual clothes of her blond, blue-eyed, and rosy-cheeked adoptive siblings. This contrast is further underlined by Esther's accent.[29]

Equally anachronistic is the setting out of which the clone Helena in *Orphan Black* emerges. Cloned by a secret military facility in North America, Helena is just one of several clone sisters born in Canada, who are all played by Tatiana Maslany. After her birth, Helena alone was brought to Ukraine, where she spent most of the 1980s and early 1990s in a Catholic convent, while her sisters remained in Canada and other parts of the Western world. The nunnery, introduced in season five through recaps of Helena's traumatic childhood experiences, does not look like a twentieth-century environment, but rather like a nineteenth-century place.[30]

The notion of post-socialist spaces and people as developmentally delayed or backward goes back to the European enlightenment, as the historians David Engerman and Larry Wolff have shown.[31] In addition to her upbringing in a nunnery, where she had to wear a grey skirt, a white blouse, and a brown cardigan as school uniform, Helena has to wear a white Victorian-looking bridal dress when captured in season two. Drawing on Choi Chatterjee, I read these references to the Victorian era as manifestations of the long-standing American nostalgia for Russia's aristocratic past.[32] Although neither *Orphan Black* nor *Orphan* refers to aristocracy directly, they allude to cultural knowledge about Russian czars and nobility. The idea of arrested development in its romanticized version locates post-socialist societies —and here Russian immigrants societies, in particular—culturally in an earlier decade, the time of the great migrations at the turn of the nineteenth century. Although not as pronounced as in the other two examples discussed in this article, some of the places where the Russian assassin Villanelle, played by the English actress Jodie Comer, comes from equally refer to a romanticized post-socialist untimeliness. Villanelle's Russia is one of beautiful art deco interiors and snowy birch forests.

Whereas these aspects and figures signify developmental delay through romanticism, some other literary and popular culture figures such as the yokel and the "retrograde (i.e., uncivilized, abnormal, and traditional) baba, an evil grandmother figure," revert most directly to the backwardness of their countries of origin, through peasant-style traditional clothing, old-school values, and xenophobia.[33] Helena's backwardness is in some scenes closely related to the idea of the baba. In season four, she literally leaves civilization to hunt and gather in the forest. Hiding out in a snow-covered wood, surviving by hunting animals with bow and arrow, and covering herself in untreated animal fur, Helena represents post-socialist (archaic) backwardness, confirming climatic (snow) and environmental (forests) clichés about Eastern European spaces. In addition, her demeanor is almost animalistic, her survival instinct leads to brutality, alternating with a sometimes childish naïveté and passionate love for her sister Sarah's daughter. Her surroundings, her behavior, and her style stand in stark contrast to those sibling clones marked as North American, especially the queer and independent (good) scientist Cosima Niehaus and corporate (bad) scientist Rachel Duncan, who both reside in metropolitan areas, wear fashionable clothes, glasses, and hairstyles, and work in research labs made of glass and steel, featuring the most advanced technology.

The notion of post-socialist backwardness is further communicated through variations of language. While Helena's heavily accented and "simple" speech is admittedly not romantic, Esther uses elaborate, artificially polite, and submissive language, which seems "backward" in a romantic or nostalgic way. Both Helena's and Esther's language stands in stark contrast to the casual, yet eloquent language of their North

American counterparts. Although clearly marked as post-socialist (and backward), neither Esther's Russian or Estonian nor Helena's Ukrainian heritage are any further differentiated or marked by a national distinction.[34]

In my third example, Villanelle, the Slavic is exchanged for a French accent. While disguise is also part of her work, the viewer learns that Villanelle chooses the French accent over her Russian native one because she likes it better. French signifies, arguably more than the Russian language, a romantic backwardness as a form of sophistication. This aspect is further highlighted by Villanelle's knowledge about art and style, and her obsession with beauty and fashion. Her old-fashioned (or backward) mannerisms are shown as problematic in multiple ways. They make Villanelle even more attractive and allow her to lure her victims into her web. This aspect is heightened even more by the fact that she is able to fake her French heritage so perfectly that no one suspects the deceit.

Esther equally shows some of Villanelle's backward behaviors and attitudes, as well as styles, but her developmental delay is shown on a much more profound level: through her body. Esther has a form of proportional dwarfism that, with some small tricks, allows her to appear to be only ten years old, when in reality she is over thirty.[35] Her small features make Esther appear to be harmless and mellow, although she is extremely dangerous and vicious, allowing her to infiltrate American upper-middle-class society. Her medical condition mirrors the idea that Eastern Europe is developmentally delayed or backward and exacerbates the danger that post-socialist backwardness poses. The mental dis/ability of all three examples equally speaks to the fear of uncontrollability and invisibility of the threat, since these figures hide their pathological characters so well.

While Helena carries some visible signs of danger on her body (such as a huge mass of unkempt, nearly white curly hair, blood-red eyes, and an almost animal-like body posture), Villanelle and Esther show no outer signs of their mental condition. On the contrary, Villanelle and Esther are beautiful and sweet, and their untimeliness or old-school behavior is quite charming. Additionally, they perfectly mimic empathy and pretend to be compassionate, when in reality they are cold, brutally calculating, and blood-thirsty. Their whiteness supports their opaqueness and adds to the scare, since their otherness and danger is not immediately visible.

The Post-Socialist Orphan and the (Dis/ability) Crises of Western Societies

The orphans Helena, Esther, and Villanelle have varying, multiple, and mostly unclear mental dis/abilities. All of them show symptoms that can be associated with post-

traumatic stress disorder as well as with a reactive attachment disorder. These symptoms include forms of violence and a lack of social bonds or emotional attachment to other people. The idea that post-socialist orphans suffer from such disorders goes back to the 1990s, when, news of adoptions of Russian and Romanian children gone wrong or studies referring to such orphaned children as examples of brain damage due to institutional neglect established the cultural figure of the psychopathic post-socialist orphan.[36]

In the fictional North American and British cultures, the three psychopathic post-socialist orphans Helena, Esther, and Villanelle appear in moments of personal or political crisis—a corrupt secret service in *Killing Eve*, multiple family crises in *Orphan*, and a more general moral and value crisis connected to the ethics of science in *Orphan Black*. At the same time, they carry notions of a more profound social crisis, as already mentioned, the "endemic crisis of ability and disability."[37] This crisis of dis/ability, I argue, structures how political, social, and institutional issues are approached in cinematic, serial, and literary narratives. Moreover, the post-socialist figures Villanelle, Esther, and Helena allow for the hierarchical arrangement of a wide range of disabilities, where mental dis/ability occupies the place of uttermost danger yet becomes deferred from the (white) North American (and British) society through its assignment to the post-socialist Other.

Villanelle's mental dis/ability is a product of her post-socialist history of neglect as a child, her abuse by a teacher and her training as an assassin. Her dis/ability seems culturally produced, rather than biological, although the show does not directly address this question. Villanelle's invisible movement in Western societies is marked as a crisis, since a group of organized criminals use her to undermine Western governments and legitimate powers.

Helena's arrival in fictional Canada also signifies a crisis of Western societies, since she and her clone sisters are products of a rogue Western military project. With the exception of Helena and her able-minded sister Sarah, who were prototypes, all the clones are genetically defective and will die at a young age if a cure cannot be found. As bio-technological experiments, the clones negotiate the ethical boundaries of military warfare and power. As clones, Helena and her sister raise questions about human identity, individuality, and uniqueness. The psychopathic orphan clone Helena embodies the danger of extremely ambitious attempts to create super-weapons, violating laws of nature. Yet the fact that Helena's most traumatizing experiences—the root of her mental dis/ability—happened after she got out of the grips of the military units that produced her again signifies post-Soviet societies as a corrupting force. Helena's trauma was inflicted by the Ukrainian nuns, who severely abused her, washing her eyes with bleach etc. While the corrupt North American military pro-

duces individual tragedies—lovely young women dying from immune deficiency diseases—only the post-socialistically socialized clone Helena transforms into a Frankenstein's monster, inflicting violence and pain on others. Only her mobilization from North America to the post-socialist sphere transformed her into a threat to the North American society, not her being an unnaturally reproduced clone per se. In this way, Helena symbolizes the question what happens, if North American bio-technology falls into the hands of the "wrong" countries.

The figure Esther signifies yet another crisis of Western society through post-Soviet mental and, additionally, physical dis/ability. Before the viewers learn that Esther is not a child, but a grown women 'suffering' from a developmental delay, they meet the American adoptive family, the Colemans, who deal with multiple dis/abilities, addictions, and mental illnesses. Esther's adoptive mother Kate has a history of alcoholism, and her adoptive sister Max is deaf and mute. While not explicitly mentioned in the film, the script spells out that Max had an accident as a toddler, due to the neglect of her alcoholic mother. The mother's problem with substance abuse, in turn, might be connected to her husband's history of marital unfaithfulness and her recent miscarriage.[38] The crises that the Colemans face are tragic, yet ordinary problems of the American middle class. The focus on post-socialist migration shifts attention away from these societal crises—as the promotional campaign for the film reminds us, "There is something wrong with Esther."[39] The film depicts mental and physical dis/ability as a problem that might be produced by society but releases society from the responsibility for it. This idea becomes clearest in the juxtaposition of Esther to her four-year-old adoptive sister Max, who is mute and deaf. While Esther's initial sweetness morphs into dis/ability horror, the American girl Max remains sweet, smart, loving, and honest. She is the ideal target for viewer empathy, the good dis/ability figure. Realizing that her family is threatened, Max overcomes not only her fears but also her dis/ability. The American child Max will be the heroine despite her dis/ability, while Esther's (mental) dis/ability, imported from her backward country, is the threat to the American dream. While Max lives, the post-socialist migrant Esther becomes a dead monster. Here, the film communicates what feminist dis/ability studies scholar Alison Kafer describes as the most common understanding of dis/ability in contemporary North America, namely "a personal problem afflicting individual people, a problem best solved through strength of character and resolve."[40] What is wrong with Esther is not only that she is dis/abled, but also that she shows no will to overcome her dis/ability and that she hides it.

Crisis and the Role of the Female Heroine

While Max develops out of her passive dis/ability/victim state to save her mother from Esther, the character of Kate Coleman develops from an insecure, addicted,

and un-fit mother to a strong heroine and protector. Kate does not give in to her addiction, although she is struggling with the loss of a child, care labor for her other two children, and her professional career. Unsure of her actions, rather passive and reluctant in the beginning, she eventually grows immune to any deception or doubt and answers Esther's last attempt to trick her into feeling maternal guilt with a kick in the head that breaks Esther's neck. The good white North-American mother dominates over the bad Eastern European psychopathic single woman who tricked her and the viewer into thinking she was an innocent child.[41]

Following the logic of the film, the severe punishment is appropriate for the violence that Esther inflicted, killing not only a nun but also her adoptive father and brother. The death penalty, executed by the family mother Kate as representation for what is good and just, however, seems the answer to her most severe offense: that she hid her real post-socialist disabled self behind the mask of an innocent child. This ability to practice deceit and hide dis/ability is the most frightening aspect of the post-socialist subject's mobility.

The emergence of the American female heroine in the successful fight against the psychopathic post-socialist orphan is a common feature in all popular culture examples discussed in this article. Unlike their male North American or British co-characters, the female heroines are more resilient, less likely to be deceived, and more ready to use violence against the post-socialist migrant intruders who threaten their Western societies. I argue that the psychopathic post-socialist orphan as figure of dis/ability facilitates the emancipation of the female heroine, allows her to exercise extreme violence, represent authority, and socially "step up" to defend Western societies.

The white female heroines that emerge against the adversary Helena in *Orphan Black* are her multiple clone sisters, first and foremost the free-spirited and rebellious Sarah Manning, who fiercely fights and often hurts Helena, before they finally bond to challenge their enemies together. Although they are less the physical fighters that Sarah is, the soccer mom Alison Hendrix and the scientist Cosima Niehaus equally develop into fierce heroines in the course of the five seasons, defending society and themselves first against Helena, and later against other corrupt forces. These Canadian citizens are represented in positive ways, unlike Helena, who can never be fully trusted and is morally floating between animalistic instinct and human compassion. They represent the spectrum of white North American individualistic culture and liberal values that promotes female emancipation, individualism, gender equality, and sexual liberation. Most importantly, they are the stable and morally upright personalities who provide the social fabric that keeps the disabled post-socialist orphan Helena in check. By the end of season five, they are Helena's caregivers (or "managers"),

facilitating her slow recovery from her chronic posttraumatic stress disorder and her episodes of psychosis.

The assassin Villanelle of the TV show *Killing Eve* is yet another post-socialist orphan with mental disabilities that provides the potential for a female heroine to shine and exercise physical violence. However, Polastri's power and use of violence is represented in an ambiguous manner. She stabs Villanelle at the end of season one to immobilize her, yet this stabbing is rather awkward, occurring in a moment when the viewer expects the two women to engage in a sexual act rather than in a violent one. Arguably, what keeps Polastri from becoming an unchallenged executor of state violence is that she is not white, but of American Korean and British heritage.[42]

The Post-Socialist Threat—The Danger of Multiculturalism?

Eve Polastri, who is played by Korean Canadian actress Sandra Oh,[43] was born in the U.K. and holds British citizenship, which allows her to hold a British government job at MI5 and later MI6. Because she grew up with her Korean American mother in the US, she has a North American accent. Moreover, she is married to a Polish immigrant and took his Slavic last name. Although she is an agent of British authority, and as such stands for British society as inclusive, her otherness to normative white Britishness is marked and explained in the story.

I draw on Fatima El-Tayeb to read the highlighting of Polastri's diverse ethnic and cultural heritage, her North American English and Slavic last name, as a strategy in liberal multiculturalism that projects images of British society as inclusive and colorblind while at the same time marking non-whiteness and non-British heritage as otherness. Such multiculturalism recreates Britishness as normatively white "allowing to forever consider the 'race question' as externally (and by implication temporarily) imposed."[44] In other words, Polastri is marked as the racial and cultural Other to British normative society who is allowed to participate in society as citizen but is not its genuine or natural part. Her juxtaposition to another cultural and ethnic Other, the psychopathic assassin Villanelle, marks a crossroads for Polastri as this Other. She can either take the opportunity to remain on the path of law and order, continuing assimilation and becoming the model (immigrant) ethnic/racial Other that defends British state and society or she can follow the disturbingly tempting assassin Villanelle into joining her as bad (immigrant) ethnic and cultural Other.

Villanelle embodies the idea of the post-socialist space as ethically corrupt. Villanelle's lack of a moral compass is shown as pathology, deriving from her post-socialist heritage, and part of her mental condition. Accordingly, the potentially corrupting influence on Polastri is not only the threat of moral corruption through discourse, but it is also the threat of corruption through (the spread) of dis/ability.

Polastri is shown as a slightly non-normative character herself, socially awkward and pathologically curious. The fact that Villanelle threatens to amplify this non-normativity because it reinstates and emphasizes mental non-normativity and dis/ability as dangerous. Villanelle's heritage suggests that the post-socialist space does not only produce mentally dis/abled orphans but also cultivates them to carry out their sinister plans to destroy Western liberal democracies. Mobilized and unhindered by open borders, the products of post-socialist corruption might corrupt other segments of good Western society, as well. Polastri accordingly represents the societal segment most endangered by this post-socialist threat. As "desirable" (immigrant) ethnic Other, she has the potential to participate in the tolerant neoliberal state. She has the choice to make the "right" choice, against corruption and for humanitarianism, and become—or continue to be—the shining heroine of the story. Yet, since the story is unfinished, it remains unclear if she can resist her curiosity for "badness" and Villanelle's temptation.

The threat that Villanelle embodies as post-socialist force potentially corrupting Polastri is mirrored on the level of international politics in the story of the Polastri's boss, Carolyn Martens. Martens, head of the Russia Section at MI6, played by British actress Fiona Shaw, is corrupted as well, working against British interests. She secretly collaborates with her Russian counterparts, Villanelle's handler Konstantin Vasiliev, played by Danish actor Kim Bodnia, as well as Martens's Russian contact, the secret service employee Vladimir Betkin (played by Laurentiu Possa). Although this speaks to the danger of evil foreign powers' infiltrating government institutions, the post-socialist corruption goes beyond politics to a much more intimate level. Villanelle is particularly charming and sexually seductive, to all genders. She shares this poise and her mastery of the art of seduction with the two other corrupting Russians in the series. In contrast to Villanelle, whose allure is her beauty, arrogance, and sophistication, among other things, these men tempt through their charm and their patriarchal projection of superiority. All of them, however, show a clear decisiveness that has a sexual component, following their sexual desires without coyness and using sexuality to deceive and trick others. For example, Marten is corrupted in a political as well as sexual sense, having had sexual relationships with both men in the past, and she likely still has. Moreover, Villanelle's and Polastri's sexual chemistry is palpable through the three seasons of the show, and the latter's growing sexual desire for the former is mirrored in her increasing interest in unlawful acts.

The Post-Socialist Sexual Other

Aggressive sexuality has been a constant in popular culture imaginations of international espionage for both genders and across national and ethnic boundaries, at least since James Bond. Scholars studying the representation of post-socialist women in

North American and Anglophone popular culture have long noticed, however, that the focus on the sexuality of (post)socialist figures, particularly female ones, goes beyond the idea of "sexpionage" and the spy thriller genre.[45] Particularly Villanelle confirms the common images of post-socialist women as exceptionally beautiful sexual objects and cunning femmes fatales due to her overt sensuality and seemingly endless sexual appetite, on which she acts to gain power over others.[46]

Helena and Esther equally bring forward the issue of increased sexual desire. While sexual desire and activity is shown as somehow pathological in all three cases to varying degrees, the connection between sexual desires and mental dis/ability is particularly pronounced in the horror movie *Orphan*. Esther, who is not really the poor orphan girl from Russia, but a 32-year-old mental patient, wants to lure the Coleman husband into having sexual intercourse with her, after she killed his son. When he refuses, she stabs him. The Coleman mother, Kate, learns about Esther's pathological character at the very moment when it is too late to save her husband. Talking to a doctor of the Estonian mental institution where Esther was held until she escaped to the United States, Kate learns Esther's real name and age, and that she has a disorder that causes proportional dwarfism.

Esther's sexuality could be considered "normal" for a 32-year-old woman, but her obsession and her violence directed at the rest of the Coleman family and others challenges such an evaluation. Instead, her sexuality is part of her horrifying mental dis/ability, further evidence that "there is something wrong with Esther." This pathologization of Esther's sexuality through the connection to her mental dis/ability and her bodily appearance is very ableist, exoticizing and othering. In the film, the Estonian doctor explains that she has a rare hormone disorder that allows her to pass as a child and that she has infiltrated and killed several families that way. He also emphasizes that Esther made sexual advances toward other family fathers, and that she killed after being rejected. To the doctor's voiceover, Esther removes all the props that allow her to appear younger, bursting into a violent fit. In addition, the scene shows the scars inflicted by a straightjacket she had to wear because of her violent acts in the Estonian asylum.

Orphan does not verbally address the sexual abuse of minors, but seeing the sexual advances of a child toward an adult man evokes such discourses. I argue that knowledge about the sexual exploitation of minors haunts the film. What is just insinuated through the visual in the film is made very explicit in the film script written by David Leslie Johnson. The script has the Estonian psychiatrist explain that Esther had been "molested by her father and sexualized at a very early age," inducing a trauma that caused her mental dis/ability. As an adult woman, she had been "passing herself off as a child [to] work . . . as a prostitute for years, catering to wealthy pedophiles," before

hiding herself in an orphanage from persecution by the police.[47]

Sex trafficking is historically part of ideas around post-socialist mobility in the North American imagination. Williams shows that contemporary cultural ideas about post-socialist women as sexually exploited trafficking victims go back to two historic cases of sex trafficking from Ukraine and Russia, which lead to the design and passing of the U.S. "Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)" in the fall of 2000.[48] As cultural and political figures, the women who have been trafficked are mostly victimized, while sex work is always shown as a morally wrong and degrading activity.[49] In that way the notion of sex trafficking connects a female figure so strongly to sexual violence (which leaves mental and often physical scars) that it leaves no other form of sexuality thinkable–except if the victim of sex trafficking is mentally broken to such a degree that she becomes a dangerous mental case, as in Esther's case.

While connecting her to more general ideas about post-socialist women as victims of sexualized violence, Esther's story in *Orphan* aligns her figure very concretely with the case of Mariya Yashenkova. Although Warner Bros. insisted that the story of the movie was purely fictional,[50] it is hard to believe that Johnson came up with a story about a Russian orphan with a story of sexual abuse without being inspired by Yashenkova's case at a moment when it was very present in the media in 2008, the exact year the script was written and the film produced. Yashenkova was five when she was adopted from a Russian orphanage and brought to the U.S. in 1998. She was sexually abused and exploited over a span of several years.[51] After her liberation, Yashenkova was featured on television, including *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and the CNN show *Nancy Grace*.[52] Her case flared up again in 2008, when her second American adoptive mother was brought to trial for neglect and abuse.[53] Arguably, Johnson connected pieces of Yashenkova's story to another real case, the four-year-old orphan Alex from St. Petersburg. In 1996 Alex, who had been adopted by a piano teacher from Wheaton, Illinois, tried to stab his sister and his mother. "He screamed at [his father] that he hated him and wished he were dead. He told [the family] he'd burn the house down, he'd kill [them]."[54] In *Orphan*, the mother is a piano teacher and the Russian adoptee burns down several houses and stabs his father to death.

Piecing together elements of news stories, *Orphan* reaffirms the connection between post-socialist heritage and sexual trauma in the figure of the Russian orphan. Through the introduction of dis/ability in the form of proportional dwarfism and mental disorder, the film re-introduces the figure of the (sexually) traumatized perpetual child that refuses to grow up to the notion of postsocialism. Esther embodies two migrant figures, which U.S.-American discourses refer to in fighting the New Cold War: the sexually abused woman and the disabled orphan. The film turns both figures of pity and care into a threat to U.S. values and people. This threat,

signified through aggressive sexuality and physical violence, needs to be immobilized and removed to reestablish the original order, which, in turn, is confirmed as good, just, and worthy.

In *Orphan*, sexuality functions as an element that increases the danger that the post-socialist psychopath poses due to his/her reactive attachment disorder. What makes these figures' mental dis/ability exceptionally dangerous is that their whiteness and (relative) ablebodiedness allows them to conceal the threat that they represent. Sexuality is yet another aspect that makes the figures frightening, not just because their sexuality is aggressive and has the potential to corrupt others, but also because it is equally invisible at first. This aspect of dangerous, yet invisible sexual threat connects the Russian figures to the history of North American homo-, queer-, and transphobia that signified the sexual and cultural Other as threat to the Future, with capital F—the continuation of human kind.[55] Like other queer figures, they have the ability to blend in, manage to infiltrate North American and British societies, and destroy them from within.

The notion of danger connected to sexuality is particularly interesting in *Orphan Black* and *Killing Eve*. Both shows represent a diverse spectrum of gender and sexual identities and desires: *Orphan Black* has multiple gay characters, such as the clone Cosima Niehaus and Sarah Manning's foster brother Felix Dawkins, and one clone who is a trans*man; *Killing Eve* features several bisexual characters, among them Eve's friend (and boss at MI5) Bill Pargrave as well as customers of a Berlin fetish studio (in season one). All of these figures' non-normative sexualities are represented as acceptable, even the hardcore fetish one that includes sex work. The psychopathic post-socialist orphans Helena and Villanelle, however, stick out in relation to the other sexually non-normative characters of their respective shows, as their sexuality seems inseparably connected to their post-socialist heritage and their mental dis/ability, corruptness, and dangerousness.

I want to relate this notion of ethnic otherness to Jasbir Puar's work on neoliberal Western societies' inclusion of some lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, and queer subjects to claim inclusivity and progressiveness in the new millennium.[56] Puar argues that the partial and strategic inclusion of previously excluded queer citizens in the protective state allows the same hegemonic powers to exclude other subjects that might even have been included previously, such as racialized migrants, religious minorities, and, I would argue, migrants with dis/abilities. Moreover, these unwanted individuals and groups become represented as dangerous to the "good" queers to legitimize their exclusion.

Killing Eve and *Orphan Black* show the discursive ideology of LGBT inclusion that Puar describes. In their juxtaposition with other, socially included and "good" queer

subjects, the almost animalistically sexualized Helena and the sexually aggressive bisexual Villanelle are not only noticeably othered as disabled and migrant; they are also represented as threats to these queer subjects. Villanelle is a threat to Eve Polastri and kills the bisexual Bill Pargrave, among other queer figures, while Helena is dangerous to her clone sister Cosima, Felix, and others. Queer figures, in this regard, represent the vulnerable subjects that call for a violent immobilization and the removal of the psychopathic post-socialist orphan that illegally migrated to North America to corrupt and/or destroy it from within.

Conclusion

Through my cripistemological reading of three fictional figures, I have tried to show how popular culture addresses dis/ability at the intersection of anxieties about post-socialist mobility and sexuality to create stories of suspense and thrill. As embodiment of fears of mobility, open borders and global movements of people, the post-socialist orphan's invisible mental dis/ability signifies danger, and makes danger understandable and palpable. The use of the orphan trope amplifies these fears not only due to its historic signification of "the threat to the identity of the dominant culture, [their] interests and values," but also due to the historical attachment to Soviet and post-socialist orphans in American society.[57] What makes these sociopaths particularly frightening is that the threat to North American and British societies and people is not immediately visible, and that they are able to infiltrate and corrupt these spaces and destroy them from within.

The post-socialist orphan figure reinstates a West–East hegemony as a response to fears about mobility and cultural encounters, as the figure's mental dis/ability is explicitly produced by the post-Soviet experience and carries notions of post-socialist trauma, developmental delay, and threatening sexuality. Notably, all three psychopathic post-socialist orphans discuss in my article pose a threat not to an idealized homogenic white society, but to ethnically, sexually, and gender "diverse" societies. Even the horror figure Esther is not simply juxtaposed to the all-American white nuclear family, but to a family with a mute and deaf child, who is the sidekick to her heroic mother. This idea of Western nations as ethically and culturally superior due to their progressive stances toward gender, sexuality, and multiculturalism is a fragile construct in the age of Donald Trump and Brexit, where homophobic and anti-emancipatory forces have gained significant ground again. Yet, especially in *Killing Eve* and *Orphan Black*, ideas about female emancipation, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ inclusion are still visible. The post-socialist mentally dis/abled intruders threaten these inclusive societies. Their non-normative sexuality is part of the threat and is clearly distinguished from "acceptable" non-normative sexualities via its connection to post-socialist corruptness and dis/ability.

As evil adversary, the psychopathic post-socialist orphan allows emancipated heroines to emerge and legitimizes their use of violence. These heroic female characters immobilize and extinguish the post-socialist threat, thereby solving multiple crises of Western societies, from unethical military experiments in *Orphan Black* and comparably banal personal crises such as alcoholism in *Orphan* to the crisis of international crime in *Killing Eve*.

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29 *Orphan*, dir. Jaume Collet-Serra (Burbank: Warner Bros., 2009).

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34 Notably, Esther is neither a Russian nor an Estonian name. Esther's "real" name is Veera in the film script and Leena in the film. Both names are Russian names, made to look more Estonian through the double consonants. The name Esther is Jewish and goes back to the book of Esther. The book of Esther describes Esther as exceptionally beautiful and that due to her convincing rhetoric and her charm Jews are spared from death, only to avenge their planed murder by killing thousands of Persian people.

35 In Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Pygmy* (2009), Agent 67, who is described as unusually small, provides a similar example of post-socialist developmental delay.

36 Stephanie Pappas, "Early Neglect Alters Kids' Brains," *Live Science*, July 23, 2012, https://www.livescience.com/21778-early-neglect-alters-kids-brains.html.

37 Johnson and McRuer, "Cripistemologies," 131.

38 David Leslie Johnson, *Orphan*, February 5, 2007, 6, *Scribd*, https://www.scribd.com/document/31421309/Orphan-2009-Movie-Script#.

39 The film and Warner Bros. were harshly criticized even before *Orphan*'s release. Parents of adopted children in the U.S. started a boycott of the movie through Facebook, and the Christian Alliance for Orphans launched a protest campaign. Warner Bros. reacted to the boycott by stressing that the protestors changed the slogan of *Orphan*'s promotional campaign from "It must be difficult to love an adopted child as much as your own" to "There's something wrong with Esther." Warner Bros. thus tried to mitigate the inappropriate representation of an orphan by arguing that it was really a representation of disability. See Rachel Abramowitz, "Quick Takes: Uproar over Orphan Movie," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 2009, http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jul/10/entertainment/et-quick10.S4; Melissa Fay Greene, "The New Movie Parents Hate," *The Daily Beast*, July 15, 2009, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-new-movie-parents-hate.

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42 *Killing Eve*, ex. prod. Sally Gentle, Lee Morris, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Emerald Fennell, Gina Mingacci, Sandra Oh, Jodie Comer, Damon Thomas, and Punit Kulkarni (New York: BBC America, 2018–2022).

43 Sandra Oh was the first Asian actress nominated for an Emmy in the category Best Actress for playing Polastri in 2018. In 2019, she won two Golden Globes for Best Actress, becoming the first woman of Asian descent to do so. The same year, she also won a Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Drama Series.

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48 Williams, *Imagining Russia*, 94.

49 Williams, *Imagining Russia*, 105.

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“But I’m Not Even in a Wheelchair”

Disability, Im/mobility, and Trauma in Hanya Yanagihara’s *A Little Life*

Dorothee Marx

Abstract

Even after decades of disability rights activism, Americans with disabilities are restricted in both their geographical and social mobility. Access to mobility still depends overwhelmingly on monetary factors, thus linking disability, poverty, and restricted mobility, both in terms of education and employment, and everyday mobility. In my article, I examine the implications of this connection by discussing the representation of disability, trauma, and im/mobility in Hanya Yanagihara’s novel *A Little Life* (2015). I analyze how the decline of both the ambulatory mobility and mental health of the novel’s main protagonist, Jude St. Francis, is represented in *A Little Life*. In a second step, I connect these representations to the novel’s notion of upward social mobility as well as to its spatial organization. Furthermore, I discuss how Jude’s mobility is restricted by his trauma and the forced institutionalization that he experiences in spite of his financial and professional success as well as his social advancement. My analysis highlights how Hanya Yanagihara’s narrative of “a protagonist who never gets better” (as the author has put it) creates a highly problematic representation of disability that is linked to death and loss of humanity. This enables me to shed light on the way *A Little Life* also undermines American narratives of linear progress and continual improvement through its resistance to therapeutic resolutions and its representation of disability. Thereby, I show how American individualism obliterates stories of disability and poverty from its narratives of social and geographical mobility.

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"But I'm Not Even in a Wheelchair"

Disability, Im/mobility, and Trauma in Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life*

Dorothee Marx

The icon of the wheelchair has come to be widely used to symbolize disability, marking accessible parking, public transport or restrooms; however, even though wheelchairs are a *mobility* aid, disability is linked to immobility in several ways. Not only are people with disabilities overwhelmingly restricted and immobilized both geographically and socially, they are also imagined as inherently immobile and dependent. This becomes especially important in an American context because the equation of disability with dependency posits disability as a binary opposite to the American ideals of independence and autonomy.[1] In this article, I examine the connection between disability and im/mobility in Hanya Yanagihara's novel *A Little Life* (2015). The bestseller tells the life stories of the four male college friends Willem, Malcolm, JB, and Jude. While each of them faces their own struggles, the narrative is centered on Jude St. Francis, who experienced unspeakable sexual abuse over the course of his childhood and suffers from the consequences of this trauma. As one of his abusers ran him over with a car, he lives through episodes of excruciating pain, increasingly has trouble walking and, as he ages, frequently uses a wheelchair.

After a short overview of the interdependence between disability and social and geographical mobility, I analyze how the decline of both the ambulatory mobility and mental health of the novel's protagonist, Jude, is represented in *A Little Life* and relate these representations to the novel's notion of upward social mobility and its spatial organization. Furthermore, I discuss how Jude's mobility is restricted by his trauma and the forced institutionalization he experiences despite his financial and professional success and social advancement. In tandem with my reading of Jude's trauma, I also address the connections between disability, sexual orientation and sexual violence that the novel generates. My analysis highlights how Yanagihara's narrative of "a protagonist who never gets better" resists and subverts the trajectory of the "trauma genre" that typically resolves the protagonist's trauma through some form

of "working-through."[2] This often includes a character's account of a previously inaccessible traumatic memory that simultaneously reveals the events to the reader and leads to the protagonist's subsequent recovery.[3] This enables me to shed light on the way *A Little Life* also undermines American narratives of linear progress, continual improvement, and "compulsory survivorship" after sexual assault through its resistance to therapeutic resolutions and its representation of disability.[4]

Defining Disability, Mobility, and Access

Which bodies are constructed as deviant or disabled has differed over time. This illustrates that disability is a historical and not a "natural" category that intersects with other identities such as gender, race, and sexuality but also depends on "education, levels of industrialization or standardization, access to adaptive equipment or privacy, and class."[5] Nirmala Erevelles underscores how ignoring that "becoming disabled" is a historical event conceals the "social relationships that produce disability as lack."[6] This construction of disability as lack has been the basis of the so-called medical model of disability that situates disability as an individual medical problem in need of treatment, cure, or elimination—in short, something that should be prevented from occurring in the first place.[7]

In a move away from the medical model, disability scholars have instead foregrounded the social, architectural and attitudinal barriers that disabled people face and that continue to push them to the margins, exclude them from full participation in society and hinder their social and geographical mobility. This social model of disability shifts the focus from the disabled individual and places disabled people's lack of access at the center of the debate, thus constructing disability as a product of "social injustice" and "enforced systems of exclusion and oppression."[8] Disability studies continues to investigate the construction of disability through analyses of the representation and construction of the disabled other. Simultaneously, the discipline also scrutinizes the social, economic, and cultural construction of the seemingly neutral position of the "normal" non-disabled. As Dan Goodley writes poignantly, "Disability only ever makes sense in relation to ability: traces of ability can always be found in thoughts of disability and vice versa."[9]

Even after decades of disability rights activism, Americans with disabilities are still overwhelmingly restricted in both their geographical and social mobility. More than thirty years after the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, many (public) spaces and public transport generally are still not easily accessible, and urban design still privileges the pedestrian over the wheelchair user, a discrepancy that Mike Oliver has described as "walkism."[10] This lack of access severely limits the movement of people with disabilities and they often become confined to their homes or to the

immobilizing environment of care homes and hospitals which effectively removes them from public view. Just as architectural barriers and systemic institutionalization continue to hinder the freedom and geographical mobility of people with disabilities, different factors, such as low incomes, additional health care costs, lack of access to higher education, and discrimination impede their upward social mobility.[11] Additionally, the acquisition of a disability label may cause or accelerate downward mobility.[12]

However, social and geographical mobility are an intrinsic, intertwined part of American exceptionalism and form part of a particular "American" identity that is interwoven with notions of independence, autonomy, and success.[13] The disabled figure consequently emerges as a particular antithesis to the white self-made American,[14] hence disability is posited as a binary opposite of the American ideals of independence and autonomy.[15] Thus, American democracy, based on the ideal of the "capable citizen," equates dependency with "inequality, weakness, and reliance on others."[16] The medically classified category of disability, established in the nineteenth century, helped exclude disabled individuals from participation in economic endeavors, and, ultimately, from the project of American liberal individualism.[17] Today, social and geographical mobility for people with disabilities still depend overwhelmingly on financial resources,[18] linking disability to poverty and restricted mobility in terms of education and employment, and everyday mobility.[19] Drawing on Marilyn Frye's definition of oppression as the restriction of motion or mobility,[20] the exclusion, marginalization and oppression that disabled people encounter are likewise experienced as immobilizing.[21]

Im/mobility and the Threat of Disability

A Little Life is a highly complex novel that chronicles more than thirty years of relationships and friendship between its four protagonists, from their first encounter as roommates at an Ivy League university, to success and fame in New York City and the deaths of Willem, Malcolm, and Jude. The interlaced, heterodiegetic narrative uses all four friends as internal focalizers and includes several monologues by Harold, Jude's adoptive father, who is talking to Willem's portrait. Nonetheless, Jude and Willem focalize the majority of the narrative with frequent perspectival shifts between the two.

The intricate structure of the novel serves to underscore the inaccessibility of Jude's traumatic past. This becomes evident already in the first part of the novel, "Lispenard Street," which is focalized exclusively by Willem, Malcolm, and JB, who each reveal their opinions and concerns about Jude before he is given a voice in part two of the novel. While the narrative progresses chronologically, the sections focalized by

Jude are constantly interrupted by flashbacks of his childhood that only gradually reveal the extent of his trauma to the reader: raised as a foundling in a monastery in the Midwest, Jude experiences abhorrent sexual, physical, and psychological abuse by the monks. At nine years old, he escapes with Brother Luke, who subsequently continues the abuse, prostitutes him to strangers in motel rooms, and teaches him to self-harm in order to cope with his feelings of shame and disgust. The novel's title stems from Luke when he tells Jude that he needs to "show a little life" during sex to please his pedophile "clients."[22] When Luke is arrested after years of this torment, Jude is placed in a group home where his abuse begins anew. He manages to escape from the group home, only to be imprisoned and raped by the psychiatrist Dr. Traylor. When Jude attempts to run away, Dr. Traylor runs Jude over with his car. After Jude has partly recovered from his injuries, he wins a full scholarship to what can be inferred as Harvard Law School, where he befriends his roommates Willem, Malcolm, and JB. After finishing college, the four of them move to New York City.

When Jude is first introduced as a focalizer in the second chapter, he is roughly thirty years old and about to begin his regular Sunday walk through New York City, which he explores as part of his new ascendance from rural childhood poverty to urban middle-class adulthood and later, upper-class prosperity. Symbolizing endless possibilities, the city functions as the backdrop to his rise to astonishing wealth and success: "The walks had begun . . . when he had moved to the city and new little about it . . . The walks had long ceased to be something he enjoyed, although he didn't not enjoy them—it was simply something he did. For a period, he had also hopefully considered them something more than exercise, something perhaps restorative."[23] At a first glance, Jude seems to adopt the role of the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneur, a figure theorized by Walter Benjamin in *Das Passagen-Werk*. Anthony Kinik describes the flâneur as "decidedly bourgeois" and "male," a man of "privilege and leisure": "He was a figure that emerged out of the extreme social flux that characterized this period . . . who, as the root—in *flâneur*, to stroll—of the term indicates, took to the streets in order to examine the developing city scape of modernity, as well as to inhabit it."[24] This definition implies that the flâneur can physically walk the city and explore the urban space on foot, marking the flâneur not only as masculine—since women were often excluded from the public realm which made the figure of the flâneuse impossible[25]—but also as able-bodied: the flâneur's "physical endurance has to be matched with sensory alertness," that is, the ability to walk, see and observe.[26]

At this early point in the story, the city remains accessible to Jude since he is still able to walk longer distances. However, it soon becomes clear that these walks are less of a classical flâneur activity, such as an expression of bourgeois dandyism or an inspection of the cityscape.[27] Instead, the anonymity of New York's streets allows Jude to access his memories, while the exploration of the cityscape is absent from

the narrative. As Janet Woolf writes of the flâneur, "The anonymity of the crowd provides an asylum for the person at the margins of society."[28] Thus, instead of an observation of "the spectacle of modern life,"[29] the narrative turns to introspection: Jude's walks serve as the starting point for a series of long flashbacks into his past that are only interrupted by the pain of his legs in the present. Walking is part of Jude's attempts to ignore, or even overcome, his physical pain and assert his continued ambulatory mobility, his independence, and ultimately his able-bodiedness: "It had been important to him to take this walk, which he feared would be the last for some time, maybe months."[30] Even though Jude is characterized as part of the upper social class because his financial security grants him the leisure to take those walks, his disability prevents a full immersion in this identity.

Jude's insistence on walking despite his pain is linked to his aversion to using a wheelchair, describing the object as "a sullen ogre" that "sulks" "in a corner of his bedroom."[31] When he must start using the wheelchair regularly, he instructs his friends to respond to any inquiries with the answer, "It's not permanent."[32] Jude resists the label of disability that comes with the wheelchair and instead maintains that his inability to walk is a temporary state. Here, *A Little Life* reproduces ableist stereotypes that interpret wheelchair use as a symbol of immobility, as the expression "confined to a wheelchair" suggests, despite the fact that a wheelchair is a *mobility* aid that can have a decidedly positive impact on the quality of life of its users.[33] The novel defines using a wheelchair as tragic, and, thus, disability, usually represented through the icon of the wheelchair user, becomes tragic by association. This characterization is not only created through Jude's narrative and his inability to accept his disability, but also reinforced in several subplots. In fact, the entire novel is interspersed with a constant undercurrent of negative portrayals of disability that, while they occur almost as if in passing, serve to continuously confirm and substantiate Jude's fear of becoming disabled.

During Jude's stay at a group home during his traumatic childhood, his room is described as follows: "A small space with a bunk bed that he shared with a mentally disabled boy, slow and fat and frightened-looking and prone to rages, whom he knew the counselors also sometimes took with them at night—and locked in again."[34] The "disabled boy" serves as a prop to give the space an eerie, gothic appearance and to illustrate the difficulties of Jude's childhood. Disability becomes abject in this passage, something troubling and "other." People with disabilities, the passage suggests, are not in control of themselves and pose a danger to other non-disabled people, an argumentation that has been previously employed to justify the institutionalization of disabled people.[35] However, the passage also establishes one of the many links between sexual violence and disability in the novel and highlights the vulnerability of institutionalized disabled people to sexual abuse.[36]

The most obvious threat of disability (and, implicitly, institutionalization) is made by Dr. Traylor, the psychiatrist who abducts and rapes Jude while threatening him with an iron fire poker: "'You try anything,' he said, 'biting, anything, and I will beat you in the head with this until you become a vegetable, do you understand me?'"[37] The scene suggests that becoming mentally and physically disabled, i.e., living in a vegetative state, is a worse fate than being beaten to death. Simultaneously, the passage also connects disability to sexual violence because it presents disability as a fate worse than rape. This, however, fails to account for "the effects of embodied violence most certainly can feel *disabling*."[38] Stephanie R. Larson highlights how the "two options—that trauma is disabling and that it is interpreted as disabling—are collapsed in public discourse, but always in ways that stigmatize and disable women [and men] and add to the marginalization of disabled people."[39] Accordingly, the disbelief and mistrust that traumatized victims of sexual assault encounter is directly linked to the dismissal of people with (mental) disabilities.

Ultimately, Dr. Traylor does disable Jude when he runs over an escaping Jude with his car. The injuries he suffers provoke episodes of unbearable pain in his back and legs and lead to the amputation of his legs towards the end of the narrative. The events with Dr. Traylor are the last of Jude's traumatic experiences revealed to the reader and are, thus, narratively constructed as the "climax" of his torment. They are the source of his increasing loss of mobility in adult life, and the trauma they cause contributes significantly to Jude's suicide at the end of the novel.

The most central example of negative portrayals of disability is Hemming, the older brother of Jude's friend Willem. Hemming has cerebral palsy, is non-verbal, uses a wheelchair, and spends his days at an assisted living center. He dies of cancer while Willem is in college after a life that becomes devoid of love and affection once Willem had left the family home in Wyoming for New York: "Their parents were efficient and competent with Hemming, but not, he recognized particularly affectionate. . . . He could tell that they viewed Hemming as their responsibility but no more."[40] Hemming, unable to take care of himself, is clearly characterized as a burden. Moreover, he illustrates the pervasiveness of the "cure or kill" trope in the novel: either a character's disability can be healed or contained, or the character is removed from the narrative, the same fate that ultimately also befalls Jude.[41]

Introduced at the very beginning of the novel, Hemming's story sets the tone for disability representation in *A Little Life*. It fundamentally serves as a plot device to illustrate that disability is connected to geographical and physical immobility and thereby linked to loneliness and isolation as well as dependence and a lack of autonomy. This is underlined by the Midwest setting of Hemming's life, also the site of Jude's traumatic abuse, which is continually associated in the novel with poverty,

emotional indifference and loss. The novel's equation of disability with dependence and Jude's aversion to the adoption of a disability identity are consistent with the negative portrayal of disability throughout the novel. Jude describes himself as a "cripple" or "freak" on several occasions in the novel and often depicts himself as "[becoming] less and less of a person."[42] Even when Jude and Willem become lovers over the course of the narrative, Jude remains afraid that Willem will treat him like his brother Hemming, "as someone who needed care, as someone who needed decisions made for him."[43] Consequently, Jude actively hides his constant physical pain from Willem and his friends.

Pain, a constant presence in Jude's life, is portrayed as a punishment in the novel. During his childhood, the monks in the monastery who raise Jude instill a belief in him that he is inherently bad. They beat him until he becomes unconscious, and one of them even lights Jude's hand on fire to punish him for stealing. Jude is convinced that his continued physical and emotional pain is a just punishment; this function of pain is projected onto other characters in the novel. When one of his abusers, Caleb, a man who rapes an adult Jude and almost beats him to death, dies, Jude's friend and doctor Andy sends him a text message: "*Assume you've seen that the asshole is dead. Pancreatic cancer = major suffering. You okay?*"[44] Pain, simultaneously, is also linked to being less-than-human, which is underlined by Jude's closeness to the animalistic during his pain episodes, in which he "mak[es] strange animal noises."[45] The link between pain and the animalistic also extends to the representation of sexual violence Jude experiences in the novel: "As one of the counselors seesawed into him, he left himself and flew above the stalls . . . looking at the scene below him . . . at the two people making a strange, *eight-legged creature*, one silent, one noisy and grunting and thrusting and alive."[46] Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Jude also envisions his traumatic memories as animals, "a pack of hyenas" that haunt him.[47]

Social Mobility: Privacy and Passing

Jude admits that he is unable to envision a positive disability identity, let alone disability pride: "I still can't think of myself as disabled. I mean—I know I am. . . . I have been for twice as long as I haven't been. It's the only way you've known me: as someone who—who needs help. But I remember myself as someone who used to be able to walk whenever he wanted to, as someone who used to be able to run."[48] The hesitation before the phrase "needs help" underlines Jude's unwillingness to confront the loss of control over his body and his declining ambulatory mobility as well as his deeply instilled understanding of disability as helplessness and dependence. Not only does Jude himself not want to picture himself as disabled, but he also works hard to appear non-disabled in public. Even when Jude is not using his wheelchair, his disability becomes visible, a fact that is constructed as problematic in the novel, as the follow-

ing exchange demonstrates: "'You could walk before?' asked Malcolm, as if he could not walk now. And this made him sad and embarrassed: what he considered walking, they apparently did not."[49] Initially, Jude's ability to walk without a cane is deemed an accomplishment that he takes pride in. But, once he moves, his gait—later described by himself as "his ugly zombie's hobble"[50]—reveals his disability and he can no longer pass as "normal."

Disability passing usually refers to "the way people conceal social markers of impairment to avoid the stigma of disability and pass as 'normal.'"[51] The only way for Jude to pass as non-disabled is not to move at all, underlining the constraint that the process of passing as able-bodied creates for him. As Jude cannot conceal his physical disability when he moves in public, he increasingly retreats into luxuriously designed private spaces over the course of the novel. While this allows him to hide his disability, it also limits his mobility and shows that physical mobility is linked to ability and normalcy in the novel, and disability is both envisioned as immobilizing and *causing* immobility.

Toward the end of *A Little Life*, Jude's legs, a source of excruciating pain and constant infection, have to be amputated. He reacts to this prospect as follows: "He will no longer be able to pretend that he isn't disabled. Up, once more, will go his freak-show factor. He will be someone who is defined, first and always, by what he is missing."[52] Especially Jude's use of the phrase "freak-show factor" is telling, since it refers to an understanding of disability as a spectacle. Exhibitions of people with disabilities in nineteenth-century freak shows "testified to the physical and ideological normalcy of the spectator" and "challenged audiences . . . to relate the performance to themselves, to American individual and collective identity."[53] Thus, while freaks were stripped of their humanity, the exhibitions satisfied "America's need to ratify a dominant, normative identity by ritually displaying in public those perceived as the embodiment of what collective America took itself not to be."[54]

A Little Life uses disability as a spectacle and reproduces an ableist gaze that frames disability as an object of examination through an "oppressive act of disciplinary looking."[55] The protagonists frequently gaze at "other bodies," such as Malcolm and Willem who "admire" a "picture of two sweet-faced girls with Down Syndrome playing for the camera in their too-tight, too-childish bathing suits."[56] Additionally, JB, who becomes a successful artist, turns photographs of Jude into paintings that are displayed publicly without his permission. Here, the novel follows the stereotypical representation of aestheticized and eroticized disabled bodies that objectifies disabled people through "mediated staring,"[57] which is exemplified further by the fact that JB does not ask for Jude's consent. Implicitly, the paintings also underscore the increasing surveillance of Jude's body. His friends and his doctor, Andy, each try to monitor

his body with the intent to control or stop his self-harm, for example by counting the cuts on his arms. Meanwhile, the reader is invited to witness the spectacular, grotesque (self-)destruction of the novel's main protagonist, through the almost voyeuristically detailed descriptions of Jude's pain, his body, and the abuse that led to his trauma and disability.

Even though Jude follows an American ascent "from rags to riches," his disability and his trauma prevent his full assumption of the identity of the "white self-made American" in pursuit of his happiness.[58] Neither his Harvard education, his professional and financial success, his caring friends, nor his adoption by his professor Harold can save him from his self-hatred and his traumatic memories: "[His abuser] had taught him how to find pleasure in life, and he had removed pleasure absolutely."[59]

As a character, Jude's disability and especially his trauma keep him from undergoing any significant development other than his decline in mental stability, increased pain and eventual inability to walk. Such a characterization approximates a so-called "narrative prosthesis" in which a disability is used as a short-hand characterization through "the way in which physical and cognitive differences have been narrated as alien to the normal course of human affairs."[60]

Looking back at the end of Jude's walk that results in his taking a taxi, it becomes clear that, even though Jude's geographical mobility becomes limited by his disability worsening in the course of the narrative, he is able to counteract this limitation through financial means. Not only is he able to afford the medical costs of his treatment, but he can navigate the city in cabs and, later, in a car with a driver. Jude also uses his financial resources to counteract the ascription of a disability identity and to pass as able-bodied. His suits play an especially important role in ensuring his protection from the gaze of others and help him incorporate competence, ability and normalcy at work: "But he often feels as if a suit is the only thing that makes him look normal. For the months he was in a wheelchair, those suits were a way of reassuring his clients that he belonged with the others, that he could at least dress the way they did."[61] Because Jude feels responsible for the years-long sexual abuse he endured as a child and sees his identity and body as permanently damaged, the clothes also provide a protection against the detection of this well-hidden trauma and, thus, help him pass as mentally and psychologically "normal" as well. Here, both physical disability and mental disability—the aftereffects of trauma—become something to be concealed. Jude's clothes function as so-called shells or "armor." As Carol Brooks Garnder and William P. Gronfein write: "Armors are those arrangements, physical or social, which serve to protect the individual with a putative disability from those disruptive contingencies (which, again, can be physical or social) associated with his or her disability that pose a threat to interaction in public."[62] The intertwining of dis-

ability and social class becomes evident in the expensive, tailor-made suits that help Jude pass as normal and compensate for his disability. The connection between disability and poverty is confirmed by Dan Goodley, who writes that "you are more likely to be labelled as disabled if you are poor."[63] Passing, that is, projecting a non-disabled identity, thus becomes something that can be bought.

In the novel, Jude rises to extraordinary professional success. It is important, however, to underscore that he is characterized not as driven by corporate greed but by his fear of aging with a disability. Despite his career at the U.S. Attorney's office in public service, he takes a contract with a corporate firm because he dreams of being able to afford an accessible apartment with a working elevator, or to always use a taxi instead of the subway. In fact, his personal American dream is not of accumulating wealth but, rather, that "he would someday have enough money to pay someone to take care of him if he needed it, someone who would be kind to him and allow him *privacy* and *dignity*."[64] As in the case of Hemming, disability is linked to loneliness and isolation, but the passage also links disability to poverty and shows that humane, dignified care is not something everyone can afford.

However, as Sean McCann points out in his review of *A Little Life*, even though the success and the wealth Jude accumulates are justified by his being "a model of sobriety, thrift, and deferred gratification," the novel paints a problematic picture of success that is based in the "gift economy of the rich" in which "characters prosper in part because they endowed with gifts that are donated to them by fortunate benefactors."[65] For example, the first set of suits that Jude receives are a gift from Harold, his then-professor. His friend Richard has inherited three buildings in SoHo from his grandparents in the import business, and he sells Jude a huge apartment in one of these buildings on a "leisurely ten-year payment schedule, an interest-free rent-to-own plan."[66] His friend Malcolm, an architect, designs the apartment for free and makes sure it is wheelchair-accessible, even though Jude protests, "But I'm not even in a wheelchair."[67] With the help of his rich friends and through his own accumulation of wealth, Jude is able to create his own accessible spaces: he buys an apartment in Soho, a flat in London, and a house in upstate New York, all of which function as luxurious retreats from the gaze of the public in a way that is described as "cocooning" in the novel.[68] Through these spaces, *A Little Life* "celebrates beauty, art, aesthetic sensibility and queer life styles as both means and symbols of social rise."[69]

The comfort, peace, and safety these refined spaces provide become all the more important for Jude as his trauma increasingly incapacitates him. These upper-class East Coast spaces with their carefully designed interiors exclude the "white trash" abusers from Jude's past and function as a contrast to the almost gothic Mid-Western motel rooms and truck cabins in which Jude's abuse took place, providing a moral

and aesthetic contrast.[70]

Jude's expensive apartments also become the spaces in which he tries to deal with his trauma through self-harm, with their expensive, attentive design functioning as a backdrop for the graphic presentation of Jude's body—both his self-inflicted cuts and the wounds that continually re-open on his legs, "burbling viscous, unidentifiable fluids . . . opening[s] that wouldn't, couldn't be closed."[71] These abject wounds seem to be exterior manifestations of his multiple childhood traumas that, according to the prophecy of his social worker, Ana, have started to "fester inside" him because he cannot talk about them.[72] The only way for him to manage his trauma lies in his nightly ritual of cutting himself with a razor blade. These repeated scenes are aestheticized not only through their poetic language but also through their setting in Jude's luxurious apartments: "that night . . . he cuts himself for the first time in a long time; he watches the blood *weep* across the *marble* and into the drain."[73]

Immobilizing Trauma—Immobilizing Care

The last representation of im/mobility in *A Little Life* that I will discuss is the topic of trauma and forced institutionalization. Within disability studies, trauma has long been seen as a highly problematic field. The resistance or refusal to integrate trauma into disability studies pertains to emotions generally perceived as "negative" and is deeply rooted in the activist origins of the discipline in the disability rights movement, which continues to fight against common ableist representations of disability as tragic or pitiable.[74] As James Berger maintains, "Not all instances of disability are traumatic, certainly not in a direct way. But many are, such as those produced by war, accident, and sudden debilitating illness, both for the individuals affected and for their families."[75] Daniel R. Morrison and Monica J. Casper suggest that the often-unacknowledged connection between trauma and disability can be sought within "the body itself [that functions as] a link between the categories of 'disability' and 'trauma'"[76]—a connection epitomized in the character of Jude. His body as the site of profound trauma and disability opens up connections between the trauma of sexual violence, disability, and sexuality. Margrit Shildrick explains that "considerations of sexual pleasures and sexual desire in the lives of disabled people play very little part in lay consciousness, and practically none in the socio-political economy."[77] And while the sexuality of disabled people is thus ignored—or "fetishized"[78]—the institutionalized settings in which many people with disabilities live, often against their will, "purposefully destroy opportunities for disabled people . . . to express their sexuality" and cause them to feel "worthlessness and sexual shame."[79] Likewise, because of power hierarchies between staff and patients, the people living in these facilities are at a much higher risk of sexual abuse.[80]

With its nearly all-male cast of characters and three main characters who enter gay relationships in the course of the narrative (JB, Willem, and Jude), the novel is seemingly set in a diegesis outside of homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality. However, as Garth Greenwell claims, the "abandonment, exploitation and abuse" that Jude experiences place "queer suffering . . . at the heart of *A Little Life*."[81] The connection between queer life experiences, such as illness and abuse is certainly present in the novel. However, when Greenwell argues that the novel evokes the "long filiation between gay art and the freakish," he overlooks that disability and its interconnection with traumatic experience also take a defining role in the novel.[82]

With regard to the connections between queerness and disability, Robert McRuer argues that "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness that produces disability is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness, that—in fact—compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa."[83] Being able-bodied and heterosexual is framed as the non-negotiable and desirable norm. Both identities need to be maintained through "repetitive performance," and both are inherently intertwined "through complex processes of conflation and stereotype: people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer (as paradoxical stereotypes of the asexual or hypersexual person with disabilities would suggest), while queers are often understood as somehow disabled (as ongoing medicalization of identity . . .)."[84]

While *A Little Life* allows its characters to freely explore their queer identities, its accounts of sexual violence and trauma negotiate and ultimately refute a third compulsion of U.S. culture, namely its demand for "compulsory survivorship," which "asks those who have been raped or sexually assaulted to overcome trauma and appear non-disabled. . . . Compulsory survivorship, then, is to be free from mental disability [i.e., PTSD or other psychological aftereffects]—to force bodies into conforming to an invisible standard that mandates that some bodies be more mentally fit than others."[85] Consequently, contemporary discourses around rape and sexual assault implicitly perpetuate stereotypes that paint people with (mental) disabilities as unfit and unreliable.

Compulsory survivorship is also perpetuated through contemporary trauma narratives, which structurally place the revelation of the protagonist's trauma as both narrative climax and plot resolution: The narrative arc moves from a slow revelation of trauma to a "redemptive process of working through."[86] Once the characters can put their experience into words, they are able to work through their trauma. While *A Little Life* creates structural suspense through the gradual exposure of Jude's past, the narrative insists on the discursive constraints of verbalizing trauma: "He finds he literally doesn't have the language to do so. His past, his fears, what was done to

him, what he has done to himself—they are subjects that can only be discussed in tongues he doesn't speak: Farsi, Urdu, Mandarin, Portuguese . . ."[87] Thus, the novel allows for Jude to refuse compulsory survivorship and emphasizes the impossibility of simply "overcoming" trauma. However, while the threat of becoming disabled that *A Little Life* creates is mainly evoked through the association between disability and death, the novel also illustrates the dire consequences for traumatized characters who do not get better: Jude's inability to overcome his trauma puts him under threat of surveillance and institutionalization, a threat that is inherently present in the lives of disabled people. Liat Ben-Moshe conceptualizes this threat as "the institution yet to come, as a looming presence in the lives of all people with disabilities" that she describes as "the ghost of forced confinement" because "institutional life, whether in a prison, hospital, mental institution, nursing home, group home, or segregated 'school,' has been the reality, not the exception for disabled people throughout North American history."[88]

Life in an institution would erase the kind of privacy that Jude so strongly craves and which he can only find in the beautiful homes he inhabits. Jude manages to escape poverty and can retreat to his luxurious private spaces, but the novel also shows that even though "money buys privacy," Jude's social mobility cannot protect him from the forced immobility of psychiatric and medical intervention that is brought on by his childhood trauma.[89] Ironically, his trauma is not only caused through confinement in the form of abduction and sexual abuse, first in a monastery where his room is a "converted closet" and then in the foster care system, but also leads to his immobilization through institutionalization and is represented as inherently immobilizing.[90] This becomes evident in the novel's extensive use of closet-metaphors that serve to illustrate how Jude tries to hide his past and identity from his friends: "Willem had always been careful not to express too much interest in exploring the many-cupboarded cabinet in which Jude had secreted himself."[91] When speculating about Jude's past and identity at the beginning of their friendship, JB remarks, "Like Judy here: we never see him with anyone, we don't know what race he is, we don't know anything about him. Post-sexual, post-racial, post-identity, post-past. . . . The post-man. Jude the Postman."[92] This joke, grounded in JB's desire to know more about his friend, takes on a darker meaning once the narrative reveals that Jude believes that his traumatic past has moved him past humanity and has made him post-human: "How inhuman he was, how deficient, how disgusting, and he was too embarrassed to be around other people, normal people."[93] Jude's "postman identity" does not signify the freedom from binary identity construction but instead marks him as an "other" who is completely unable to become "post-past" and whose identity is defined by the trauma he experienced.

Since "the closet" also serves as "the defining structure for gay oppression," the

repeated closet metaphors also hint at Jude's sexual orientation.[94] Because of the years of abhorrent sexual abuse he endured, Jude is unable to find pleasure in sex and, since it began in childhood, he was never able to develop a sexual identity: "He had always had sex with men, and so assumed he always would."[95] So, the closet metaphors also indicate that the confinement and suppression caused by his trauma extend to his sexual identity: while his physical disability readily discloses itself, Jude is unable to come out as "gay" or "traumatized," because revealing one would also uncover the other. While the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality does not appear pressing in a diegesis with so many openly gay characters, the discourse of compulsory survivorship is implicitly inscribed in the world of *A Little Life*. Jude is unable to speak about his trauma but because he does not get better, he is treated by medical professionals, even without his consent. Jude himself believes that his identity is unalterable: "The person I was will always be the person I am, he realizes. The context may have changed … But fundamentally, he is the same person, a person who inspires disgust, a person who is meant to be hated."[96] Ultimately, neither his friends nor extended therapy are able to convince Jude otherwise.

As a person with mental health concerns, Jude is under constant risk of involuntary commitment. His friend and doctor, Andy, threatens repeatedly to have him committed. When Jude tries to commit suicide, he is indeed hospitalized involuntarily, placed on medication and made to see a therapist. When he tries to starve himself to death after his friend and lover Willem dies in a horrific car accident, he is first hospitalized only briefly, put on a feeding tube, and then forced to start eating again under the ever-looming threat of long-term hospitalization. This is described in a long paragraph of anaphoric sentences, which underline the inevitability of his treatment. Jude, who has experienced time and again that his body is acted upon against his will, is now put under surveillance and forced to "get better" without his consent. It becomes clear here that even though Jude is in a powerful position in almost every other aspect of his life, once his mental health is compromised, he is put in the powerless position of a "patient" and his mobility is restricted. Normalcy, in the novel, is not only connected to concepts of physical but also of mental or psychological "wholeness."

As indicated above, *A Little Life* resists the common structure of the "trauma genre" in which characters' revelations of their traumatic memories through their own narratives function as healing and instead constructs (talk) therapy and, ultimately, narrative, as a form of physical violence: "How often could [Jude] really be expected to repeat himself, when with each telling he was stripping the clothes from his skin and the flesh from his bones, until he was as vulnerable as a small pink mouse?"[97] Talking about his traumatic past has no healing effect for Jude but only forces him to relive his painful memories. The narrative reveals his traumatic child-

hood through a series of flashbacks that are embedded in a linear narrative that starts in Jude's twenties which parallels the violence of his childhood including his self-harm and sexual abuse through his short-term partner Caleb in the present. But even the revelation of his abuse by Dr. Traylor, the sad "climax" of his traumatic past, does not function as the story's resolution. Although he finally shares the details of his years-long sexual abuse to his partner Willem, the confession, which takes place in their walk-in closet over the course of an entire weekend, cannot absolve Jude of his self-hatred, heal his trauma or release him from his need for continued self-harm. Instead he remains confined in his "closets."

His memories, which are alternately described as a "metastasized" cancer or material, living creatures, cannot be stopped through talk-therapy or "working-through": "This is a long eel of a memory, slippery and uncatchable, and it whipsaws its way through him, its tail slapping against his organs so that he feels the memory as something alive and wounding, feels its meaty, powerful smack against his intestines, his heart, his lungs."[98] Instead, the "hyenas," the painful, traumatic memories that "chase him," have to be combatted through constant self-mutilation because "he knows that they will be quieted only by his pain."[99] It is Jude's trauma that is profoundly debilitating and that restricts his life far more than his physical disability and from which neither his extensive travels nor his luxurious apartments can protect him. Even though the novel suggests that the immobility of disability can be overcome through hard work that leads to success and the necessary financial means, the trauma Jude has experienced is so profound that he remains forever immobilized by his past, unable to develop as a character and only able to escape his trauma through suicide shortly before the end of the narrative, after his confidante and lover Willem has died. Jude's suicide, problematically, is constructed as the only means for him to free himself of both his trauma and the violent attempts to keep him alive through therapy and force-feeding. While *A Little Life* allows for its main protagonist to resist the discourse of compulsory survivorship, the novel's singular, grim alternative to getting better and overcoming trauma is "getting worse" and, ultimately, death.

Conclusion

American culture is well steeped in narratives of social and geographical mobility that construct immobility as an abnormal, even pitiful state that is linked to isolation, poverty, and lack of agency. My close reading of *A Little Life* suggests, then, that disability is deeply connected to immobility and that this immobility must be overcome or erased so that characters can still pass as successful American individuals. At the same time, the narrative suggests that trauma, connected to Jude's disability by means of his body and the fact that he becomes disabled at the end of a series

of profoundly traumatizing events, cannot be overcome, neither through social nor geographical mobility. And while the novel seemingly refutes compulsory survivorship when the narrative denies Jude the chance to get better, it also illustrates the dire consequences of Jude's insurmountable trauma: surveillance, treatment against his consent and institutionalization.

Although Jude moves from the Midwest to the East Coast and from poverty to success and wealth, he cannot escape his past that has seemingly inscribed itself on his body. In *A Little Life*, both disability and trauma, then, are drawn as immobile, static binaries: one is either able-bodied or disabled, either mentally "whole" or too deeply damaged to ever get better. Disability, as my analysis has shown, and profound (sexual) trauma lead to death in the narrative, because therapy does not offer a solution, "nothing will help" the pain (both painkillers and psychopharmaceuticals are painted as unhelpful) and so, suicide, the narrative problematically suggests, remains the only option.[100]

A Little Life is a novel that has mostly been reviewed as a tale of friendship, trauma, or as "The Great Gay Novel."[101] However, its connection to disability has been overlooked in what Jeffrey Brune calls "abstract passing," which often "suppresses discussions of disability" in literature and the public sphere.[102] Thus, as I have shown, *A Little Life* is also profoundly structured through the mobility and immobility of disability. With its focus on the social ascent of its main protagonist and the framing of physical disability in settings of luxurious lifestyles, the novel shows how American individualism obliterates stories of disability and poverty from its narratives of social and geographical mobility. While the right financial means can absorb the immobilizing effects of disability, trauma remains the one immobilizing obstacle that cannot be overcome.

Notes

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Going West, Slow and Fast

Speed and Surveying in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*

Burak Sezer

Abstract

This article examines the speed and mobility of surveying of pre-revolutionary America in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* (1997). Pynchon contrasts the extremely slow and directed physical drawing of the Mason–Dixon line with the infinitely fast and undirected speed of magic and dream. This confrontation of mobilities extends into a more general discussion of Enlightenment science and romantic reverie and their clash in Pynchon's novel. I contend that this investigation of mobility helps extend the conceptualization of the well-established opposition of rationality and irrationality in Pynchon scholarship and beyond.

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Going West, Slow and Fast

Speed and Surveying in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*

Burak Sezer

In his epic poem "Eureka" (1848), Edgar Allan Poe decries the scientific principles of induction and deduction as "two narrow crooked paths—the one of creeping and the other of crawling—to which, in their ignorant perversity, they have dared to confine the Soul—the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of '*path*.'"[1] His metaphor visualizes the movement of scientific progress along a pre-determined path, emphasizing its extremely slow and maladroit locomotion through the hendiadys "creep and crawl," which he places in opposition to the soul's design—to soar in a manner free of determination. Further, Poe insinuates that the soul's free movement is under constant threat of being stifled by the logic of science. Strikingly, these *eigenmovements* of reason and fantasy also constitute a hitherto largely unexplored leitmotif in Thomas Pynchon's fifth novel, *Mason & Dixon* (1997). In the following, I will argue that Pynchon's novel contextualizes and contrasts precisely the two aforementioned modes of movement. By tracing scientific and imaginary movements in the novel, I will distil a Pynchonian concept of American im/mobility. In so doing, this examination of movement will not only reappraise but even reconcile the antagonism between science and fantasy, a prevalent trope in Pynchon scholarship and beyond.

Mason & Dixon is set in colonial America on the eve of the Declaration of Independence. From the perspective of the post-Revolutionary War period, Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke narrates the border surveys between the British colonies Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1767, conducted by English astronomer Charles Mason and surveyor Jeremiah Dixon. Pynchon's novel is relevant to a conceptualization of American im/mobility since Mason and Dixon's expedition epitomizes the most iconic movement associated with America: they move westward, thus pushing the frontier. Yet, their expedition is, contrary to all expectations, not a homogenous enterprise. Their venture commences as an explicitly scientific endeavor but gradually transmogrifies into a romantic caravan trip that mirrors the loosening of Britain's colonial grip and the emergence of American independence. Precisely this shift, I

will argue, is reflected in their movement. As a scientific expedition, they move slowly, only to accelerate again during the final romantic episodes of their project.

In *Mason & Dixon*, movement occurs in two ways: physical and imaginary, analogous to Poe's discussion of the "creeping and crawling" of science versus the "soaring" of the soul. Two short episodes before Mason and Dixon's departure to America illustrate the tension between these modes of movement. Ruminating on America in Britain, Mason is caught by "Mobility's Grip" in the midst of a frequented London thoroughfare, after which he surprisingly finds himself "thro' an Agency yet to be discover'd . . . not so much transported as translated, to a congruent Street somewhere in America." Shortly thereafter, Dixon, who is journeying down the Thames on board the collier *Mary and Meg* to meet Mason, finds himself enshrouded in a mysterious fog, whereupon the crew realizes they have magically "floated to America," as Mason had before.[2] The ability of fantastic agents to instantly and safely "translate" (i.e., "bring across") Mason and Dixon to America, albeit only for a fleeting moment, stands in stark contrast to Mason and Dixon's physical travels aboard the ship *Seahorse*, which prove to be slow and perilous. Translation stands furthermore in stark contrast to physics as a scientific paradigm, since instant translations are inexplicable by the universal laws of Newtonian mechanics and thus beyond the realm of possibility.

The opposition between the two movements is maintained in the drawing of the demarcation line forming the heart of the novel: the real, physical movement west is earthbound, extremely decelerated, repetitive, arduous, and dangerous, whereas all romantic dreams of the unexplored American wonders in the west are free, airborne, and accelerated and sometimes even infinitely fast. The novel offers various perspectives and voices conducive to understanding to what extent a single line poses a threat to mobility and how that threat is potentially counteracted. In order to combine these perspectives, I will follow the novel's chronology of Mason and Dixon's journey; special emphasis will be placed on the discussion of the two major parameters defining the scientists' movement: their directionality, as the Mason-Dixon line is a *straight* line, and their speed, as it takes them more than three and a half years to run a series of lines only approximately 331 miles long.[3] Moments of deceleration and acceleration as well as clashes between physical and phantasmagorical movements offer a more complete picture of a highly delicate age of transformation in America, as the Mason-Dixon expedition's physical westward expansion inaugurates a more symbolic American movement: the American Revolution.

The Fantastic

Mason and Dixon first meet in 1761 to observe the Transit of Venus to calculate the solar parallax. Both are introduced as aspiring and well-equipped scientists—in fact,

Mason is an accomplished "Adjunct of the Prime Astronomer of the Kingdom" Dr. James Bradley. The prospect of their teamwork is auspicious as they complement each other in terms of knowledge and method. As Dixon, the surveyor, puts it, "I have recourse much more often to the Needle, than to the Stars,— yet, what I lack in Celestial experience, I pray I may counterpend with Diligence and a swift Grasp."[4] Shortly after their first correspondence, they meet in Portsmouth where they encounter a mysteriously eloquent "Learnèd English Dog." Both scientists are visibly bewildered when the dog says, "'Tis the Age of Reason, rrrf? There is ever an Explanation at hand, and no such things as a Talking Dog,— Talking Dogs belong with Dragons and Unicorns. What there are, however, are Provisions for Survival in a World less fantastick." This is all the more confounding since Mason and Dixon are faithful representatives of science; their worldview precludes phenomena such as talking animals: "'Mason, pray you,— 'tis the Age of Reason,' Dixon reminds him, 'we're men of Science.'"[5]

The appearance of the Learnèd English Dog marks the first disruption of a hitherto realistic setting, which could be interpreted as a "fantastic" disruption in Tzvetan Todorov's sense, self-reflexively highlighted by the dog's use of the term "fantastick." The reader, like Mason and Dixon, lingers in a state of suspension regarding whether a talking dog can be explained, as, for instance, a hallucination induced by a *folie à deux* or by sheer confabulation on the part of the narrator Cherrycoke. If not, the novel must be classified as supernatural, thus embodying a work of fantasy. Todorov reserves the term "hesitation" for this lingering, noting that "the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event."[6] *Mason & Dixon* is replete with many more apparently supernatural elements woven into the historiographic reconstruction related to movement, such as a *perpetuum mobile* watch and a mechanical duck that moves so fast it fades into invisibility. Both a *perpetuum mobile* and infinite velocity are instances of mobility inexplicable through scientific reasoning, which is predominantly the modus operandi of both Mason and Dixon: "There is no Perpetual-Motion," says Dixon and "'Tis a Law of the Universe," affirms Mason.[7] Besides these rather conspicuous anomalies, however, *Mason & Dixon* stands out as being faithful to historical evidence and physical factuality for long stretches.[8] Therefore, the fantastic seems irresolvable because it neither entirely collapses into the marvelous, nor into the uncanny.

Given the preponderance of criticism available on the dichotomy between science and fantasy in *Mason & Dixon*, Todorov's typology might appear to be a rather ineffectual theoretical adjunct. In fact, practically all essays in the two seminal anthologies on *Mason & Dixon*—Brooke Horvath and Malin Irving's *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon (2000) and Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds's *The Multiple Worlds of* Mason & Dixon (2005)—at least touch upon that issue. However, Todorov's concept of the fantastic is use-

ful precisely because it uses "hesitation" as an element of mediation between the "fast" and "slow" narrative: a fast narrative is coherent and homogenous, whereas a slow narrative is replete with inconsistencies and counternarratives. It is striking to see that Mason and Dixon initially brush aside all elements of the fantastic on the grounds of being "Men of Science," only to cast doubt upon precisely that premise as they draw the line: "'Get a grip on yerrself, man,' mutters Mason, 'what happen'd to 'We're men of Science'?'"[9] By decelerating their scientific progress and introducing the element of hesitation shared by the protagonists and readers alike, Pynchon highlights key limitations with regard to purportedly flawless applications of scientific insights into a marvelous world. In other words, the slowness of the Mason-Dixon project bespeaks the impossibility of reducing their undertaking to scientific parameters alone, and the constant halting, stopping, and pausing in their progress foregrounds the shortcomings of a purely scientific outlook.

Similarly, in his conclusion of *The Fantastic* (1970; English translation 1973), Todorov shares a piece of information conducive to understanding the function of introducing fantastic elements into an otherwise realistic scenery. According to Todorov, the fantastic novel is "a literature which postulates the existence of the real, the natural, the normal, in order to attack it subsequently."[10] Correspondingly, Pynchon's integration of the fantastic into the Age of Reason implies a criticism of the presumptuousness of reason itself, insofar as it discards the legitimacy of the marvelous coexisting alongside it. The continuous presence of the fantastic in *Mason & Dixon* portends that many occurrences in the novel will not defer to a scientific account associated with the Enlightenment. When it comes to fantastic movements such as the *perpetuum mobile* or infinite velocity, the fantastic intrusion disrupts the Newtonian paradigm, which has claimed full authority as an explanatory model of all physical movement, especially for the erudite scientists.[11] Thus, Pynchon suggests that the comprehension of the world has not been exhausted by the Enlightenment ideal and allows that there may be movements that cannot be grasped based solely on their physical manifestation. This becomes apparent in the latter sections of the novel, where Pynchon rehabilitates the axis of romanticism and phantasmagoria from the oblivion of the Enlightenment, which proves as important to the historical conceptualization of America as scientific factuality. Pynchon installs fantastic movement as a complement to the physical, as he excoriates the mundanity of all the endeavors surrounding the drawing of the line and elevates even the minutest calculations into a position of cultural prominence.

Creeping and Crawling the Line

At the outset of their expedition, when all romantic dreams of the West have not yet been articulated, the intentions of Mason and Dixon are professional and prosaic. The

scientists have a relatively strict time schedule so as not to miss the second Transit of Venus in 1769. They arrive at the east coast of America in 1763, where "running the Line would take them four of those years, with an extra year for measuring a Degree of Latitude in Delaware," foreshadowing their slow and tedious progress. In December 1763, they relatively quickly "establish . . . the southernmost Point of Philadelphia," their first task assigned by the officials. They know that "Fifteen Miles South of this, . . . will the West Line run."[12]

Starting the West line already proves to be so unpredictably difficult that it significantly delays their departure. According to their instructions, they need to find a degree of perfect latitude (39°43'17.4" N), along which they must proceed westward. Mason and Dixon attempt to locate this spot by approximating its latitude from both north and south, which takes nearly six months: "By February they have learn'd their Latitude closely enough to know that Sector is set up 356.8 yards south of the Parallel that passes thro' the southernmost point of Philadelphia," but they find that they are still "about ten and a half seconds of Arc off."[13] The historical Mason and Dixon suspected that error; in their journals, it is maintained that "kings lacked competence in scientific matters and in the writing of their colonial charters made impossible geometrical specifications."[14] It is incumbent on the fictional Mason and Dixon to rectify these inaccuracies.

Therefore, they measure the new southernmost point of Philadelphia to satisfy the charter's demands, with a series of exacting scientific calculations ensuing. "In March a Company of Axmen, using Polaris to keep their Meridian, clear a Visto . . . fifteen Miles true south" for Mason to be able to align his telescopes. Then

> in April Mason and Dixon, using fir Rods and Spirit Levels, measure exactly the fifteen miles southward, allowing for the ten and a half Seconds off at the north end. In May they find their new Latitude . . ., then remeasure the Line northward again,— . . . By June, having found at last the Latitude of their East–West Line,— . . . they are instructed to proceed to the Middle Point of the Peninsula between Chesapeake and the Ocean, to begin work upon the Tangent Line. By the end of the Month, they have chain'd north from the Middle Point to the Banks of Nanticoke.[15]

It is rather ironic that Pynchon narrates this in a single paragraph. There is a blatant mismatch between what Gérard Genette calls "narrative speed" and Mason and Dixon's "actual speed": less than a page against half a year.[16] By dint of this narrative sleight of hand, Pynchon implicitly ridicules the project. What could have been achieved in a short period of time is, due to the exigency of topographical exactitude, so artificially bloated and repetitive (as they also need to "remeasure" the line) that the reader begins to impugn the rationale behind their surveying.

Furthermore, identifying the Tangent point proves to be even more difficult an objective than initially assumed. It is, again, comical to observe Mason and Dixon's ongoing struggle over the plan in the course of the second half of year 1764: "In August they finally go chaining past the eighty-one-mile mark, which they figure puts them a little beyond the Tangent Point, wherever it is, back there. They take September, October, and November to find it, as nicely as Art may achieve, computing Offsets and measuring them, improving the Tangent Line by small Tweaks and Smoothings, until they can report at last that the ninety-degree Angle requir'd . . . is as perfect as they can get it."[17] All of this ultimately takes a year, which mirrors the grotesque time discrepancy of reading a few lines in the novel and the diegetic actions that stretch to lengthy durations. Upon reviewing their progress in December, the ironical undertone is noticeable: "'To a good year's work.' Dixon raising a pewter Can of new Cider. 'And pray for another.' 'To Repetition and Routine,' Mason gesturing reluctantly with his Claret-Glass"—and it proves to be repetitive indeed, as on "the Twenty-ninth of May" the next year, "they are occupied again with the enigmatick Area 'round the Tangent Point, seeking to close the Eastern boundaries of Pennsylvania and Maryland," which requires an additional "three weeks."[18]

In the midst of these numerical and geometrical operations, Pynchon introduces John Harland, who has no interest in following Mason and Dixon along the Tangent line, but only along the West line as an "Instrument-Bearer." His farm happens to be exactly where Mason and Dixon need to set up their post, "the single Point to which all work upon the West Line . . . will finally refer"; a neo-Greenwich, so to speak. When Harland is informed about Mason and Dixon's plans, he "ha[s] Romantic thoughts for the first time . . .,— he has been running Lines, into the distance, when once Brandywine was far enough,— and now he wants the West." Pynchon contrasts the overly meticulous and prosaic movements south along the Tangent line with the pending romantic movement along the West line, into the unknown: "To face West, can be a trial for those sentimentally inclin'd, as well as for ev'ryone nearby. It is possible to feel the combin'd force, in perfect Enfilade, of ev'ry future second unelaps'd, ev'ry Chain yet to be stretch'd, every unknown Event to be undergone."[19] "Feeling" the west is described as a fantastic apparition, which escapes the clutches of scientific time and space metrics and defies all physical understandings of velocity, since "seconds" and "Chains" are insubstantial categorizations for that matter, harking back to the aforementioned fantastic translations of Mason and Dixon to America.[20] Moreover, the fact that Harland, among others, joins the expedition foreshadows the group's growing heterogeneity and diversity of interests, as scientists and romantics are forced to mingle—a trope prevalent in American literature since Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), which details the numerous conflicts during the *Pequod*'s odyssey, most notably between the darkly romantic, irrational Ahab and the assiduous, ratio-

nal Starbuck.

As the survey team begins their auspicious movement into the romantic unknown, the reader is again disappointingly confronted with the vacuity and slowness of the enterprise. Reminded of the insipid trifles related to the drawing of the Tangent line, it feels like the West line is little more than a return of the repressed. Although the monodirectionality of the straight West line appears to be an endeavor quickly realizable, it is, paradoxically, precisely the straightness of the line that decelerates their movement. When William Emerson, a Newtonian mathematician and teacher of Dixon, had heard of Dixon's plan to travel to America, he warns him that "'twill not be an easy journey,— . . . there'll be days when the Compasses run quaquaversally wild boxing themselves, and you, into perplexity."[21] Quaquaversality, or the quality of uncontrollably flailing in all directions, here not only alludes to America's inexhaustible spatial complexity and vastness, but also to the necessity of constantly readjusting all instruments of measurement in order to prevent the line from swinging the slightest bit away from the desired latitude. Preserving the line's straightness thus requires constant measurement, hence the slowness. Quaquaversality is also a principle of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have called "smooth space" as opposed to "striated space": "The first aspect of . . . smooth space is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step."[22] America as a smooth space,[23] as a "local space. . . of pure connection,"[24] is thus invaded by a straight line whose logic is not motivated by cultural aspects, geological formations or vegetational ambiance, but only by the "geometrick Whimsicality of the Kings,"[25] reducing quaquaversality to monoversality.

Pynchon satirizes the preposterousness of the straight line by showing how Mason and Dixon do not skirt any obstacles on its path. Shortly after their departure into the west, it "takes them less than a week to run the Line thro' somebody's House"—a little Pynchonian pun, as "takes them less than a week" can be understood as both "less than a week after the start of the West line" and "a little less than a week but still disproportionately many days." Their progress is unnervingly slow in the service of latitudinal accuracy: "Each ten Minutes of Great Circle, about ev'ry twelve miles, their Intention is to pause, set up the Sector and determine their Latitude." The reader begins to witness a glaring disconnect with regard to how speedily the line is drawn on a map and how arduously it is actualized by the surveyors because they could have simply bypassed the house. This is also communicated by William Emerson, as he teaches that "earthbound, . . . we are limited to our Horizon, which sometimes is to be measur'd but in inches.— We are bound withal to Time, and the amounts of it spent getting from end of a journey to another. Yet aloft, in Map-space, origins, destinations, any Termini, hardly seem to matter,— one can apprehend all at once the entire plexity of possible journeys, set as one is above Distance, above Time

itself."[26] Emerson's lesson predicts that the actual replication of the trajectory will be a time-consuming enterprise, a movement obstructed by small details and "inches" that precludes swift completion, whereas the lines on the map itself transcend the clutches of time altogether.

In other words, on a map, the line is drawn within seconds, regardless of whether it crosses houses, rivers, quicksand, or forests, but on the surface of America, such an unobstructed mobility is immediately precluded. Pynchon's multiple references to the "geometrick Whimsicality of the Kings" and "Royal Geometry" resonate with the fact that the straight line is drawn by a ruler in both senses: by a king and by a straightedge ruler. As a token of the absurdity of such detached royal governance, the actual West line must run "straight down the middle of the Bed [of a married couple], of course," which exposes the plan's disinterest towards the American people and their individual situations. Rhys Price, the owner of the house, then reprimands: "Separating Neighbors is one thing, . . .— but separating Husband and Wife,— no wonder you people get shot at all the time."[27] The strictness of the plan does not permit any deviation in terms of their movement, even if that were the preference of the people and ultimately also favorable to their pace.

This brute-force advance into the west also proves to be perilous in the course of their expedition. The West line fixates the royal declaration of what belongs to which territory, Maryland or Pennsylvania, forcing a division of animosity among the people. At that time, British America was in deep tumult because of the ongoing Stamp Act Crisis; many parties in the novel are infuriated because of the seemingly arbitrary taxation embodied in the Stamp Act, so that "Whiteboys and Black Boys, Paxton Boys and Sailor Boys" display a "threat of Mobility ever present."[28] Here, "threat of Mobility" is ambiguous: it means both "revolution," but also literally the threat of being attacked when moving among these gangs, especially since Mason and Dixon perform the will of the Crown, which is an anathema to all of them. Pynchon's frequent use of the terms "Mobility" and "Mob" antagonizes the logic of the monodirectionality of the line. Mobs are instances of chaotic and unordered movement and therefore resistant to all governance by royal fiat, constantly exuding the threat of subversion. The fact that they display a "threat of Mobility" also implies that mobility in the sense of free and unobstructed movement is precisely what the line attempts to stifle. Philosopher Paul Virilio offers an account of this dynamism related to revolutions: "The masses are not a population, a society, but the multitude of passersby. The revolutionary contingent attains its ideal form not in the place of production, but in the street, where for a moment it stops being a cog in the technical machine and itself becomes a motor (machine of attack), in other words a *producer of speed*."[29] A "cog in the technical machine" performs slow, ordered, and calculated movements. The deviation from this orderliness marks the inception of the (American) revolu-

tionary act, the first act of civil disobedience, and the mobs harbor that power for mayhem by virtue of their chaotic mobility.

Such an exposition to a wider range of heterogenous groups is important to understanding the expedition's lack of speed. Brian Edwards observes that "as Mason and Dixon proceed with the Line, their progress across the landscape is interrupted not only by meetings with the milkmaids, farmers, axmen, innkeepers and tavern wits … but also by variations upon old New World narratives. … Complicated with the introduction of Captain Zhang, Chinese opponent of the Jesuits, ideas of precedence, sacred truth, heresy and competing nations (including the French and Spanish as well as the English) create a vibrant religious-political confusion if competing demands for property and authority."[30] Thus, as "The Crew" swells "up to thirty Hands" and later is "throng'd and a-blare with skin-wearers and cloth-wearers ever mingling, Indian and White, French and Spanish,"[31] becoming successively more heterogenous, the narrative of running the line is also subject to "variations," as Edwards says. Their internal and external interests come into conflict with other groups, calling for a democratic resolution the logic of the line does not obey. Especially the straightness of the line, which symbolizes the insistence on implementing a single colonial narrative that cannot be altered or bent, is what incenses the people; they witness firsthand how their desires and voices are invalidated by the line. What Edwards calls the "interrupted progress" of Mason and Dixon is a symptom of this clash of narratives. Their "interrupted progress" due to conflicts with other groups, and in fact nations, becomes explicit when they are forced to wait for "Sir William Johnson to negotiate with deputies from the Six Nations, assembl'd at a German Flat, upon Mohawk, as to the continuation of the Line beyond the Alleghany Crest." As a result, "the Surveyors loiter week upon week in Philadelphia" and ultimately "get a late start this Year, not reaching the Alleghany Front until July, a full year since they left off their Progress West."[32]

Yet, what proves to be the most compromising agent of deceleration is the American natural environment. The farther west they move, from civilization to wilderness, the harsher that environment becomes. Pynchon stylizes nature as a retaliatory saboteur of the survey expedition, to which the group is highly vulnerable: despite being well-equipped as scientists, they are ill-equipped for traversing America. When they cross a river and try to return, Mason and Dixon realize that "the same River by then [had] become much enlarg'd, [and] to cross back over it, would have presented a Task too perilous for the Instruments."[33] It is documented in their journals that "extreme care was exercised in the transportation of the fragile instruments, which were placed on a featherbed in a wagon. It appears to have required a two-day trip by horse … to cover the 31 miles."[34] That delay occurred due to the swelling of the same river described in the novel; it is moreover recorded in their *Journals* that "[p]acking

up the Instruments" and putting the "Instruments into the wagons" is a time-consuming routine that fills an entire day.[35] Their predicament is aggravated: "Try to turn the angles and obtain the star shots, getting in addition snake-bit, trapp'd in sucking Mud, lost in Fog, frozen to the Marrow, harass'd by the farmers, and visited by the Sheriffs." It appears that the ruthless inclemency of American nature is a defensive mechanism to stall their measurements, symbolizing the romantic struggle against the chokehold of rationality. In this sense, their telescopic measurement is obstructed multiple times: "They have been held up by the Weather,— first Snow, which by the fourth day, even undrafted, has reached a depth of two feet and nine inches,— then clouded Skies, which prolong the impossibility of Zenith observations."[36] Pynchon demonstrates that the actual running—or in this sense "creeping and crawling"—of the West line is by no means as simple and straightforward an undertaking as it is deceptively suggested to be; his depiction of the ruthlessness of American nature exposes the cliché of the serene and welcoming "virginal wilderness.""

The destructive force of the line impacts America's pristine nature, going beyond the expedition's ungainly "trampling Garden patches or molesting Orchards." If it is not clouds and snow that impede Mason's stargazing, trees prove to be an even greater obstacle the more they move into the romantic wilderness: "'Nothing so clear and easy as that in Delaware, however,' Dixon mutters to himself all shift long. 'If we set up over there, then this great bloody Tree's in the way,— yet if we wish to be clear of the Tree for any sight longer than arm's length, we must stand in Glaur of uncertain Depth." Dixon's utterance connects the group's deceleration in the woodlands with the increasing difficulty of surveying after having departed from Delaware, where it was comparatively "clear and easy," in contrast to the wilderness, "near this d——'d many Trees" where "seeking a line of sight that will allow them to use a Right Angle" is a "Fool's Errand, as it proves."[37] Were it not for the latitudinal imperative and the necessity of constantly reaffirming their current location, trees would not have been a nuisance to the scientists and they would be able to maintain moderate speed. But because of the latitudinal imperative, a substantial number of trees need to be felled, often referred to in the novel as the "clearing of the Visto." Consequently, Mason and Dixon are accompanied by a large group of lumberjacks, whose sole assignment lies in cutting down trees to grant Mason an unhampered view of the night-sky. At the cost of a further deceleration, this bulldozing of the American landscape fits conveniently within the Enlightenment ideal of clear vision.

The removal of trees and their canopies also clears the path of light as the sky now casts uninterrupted diurnal and nocturnal illumination upon America which allegorizes the triumphant path of the Enlightenment from another perspective. Although many critics, such as Brian McHale, Victor Strandberg, and Brian Edwards have unanimously diagnosed Pynchon's critical stance toward unbridled Enlightenment think-

ing,[38] Hanjo Berressem rightly observes that "many articles [on *Mason & Dixon*] are lacking … a definition of what they mean when they say that Pynchon criticizes 'the Enlightenment.'"[39] Granted that Pynchon's criticism of the Enlightenment is multifaceted, the West line caricatured as a "*tree-slaughtering Animal*, with no purpose but to continue creating forever a perfect Corridor over the Land [with] [i]ts teeth of Steel,— its Jaws, Axmen" captures the gist of it.[40] Actualizing the Mason–Dixon line comes with a total illumination—the ideal of the Enlightenment. The German Enlightenment philosopher Christoph Martin Wieland writes about the importance of light in finding the truth in "Sechs Fragen zur Aufklärung" ("Six Questions on the Enlightenment"; 1781). According to Wieland, "there be enough light" is a prerequisite for finding the truth. He adds that "in the dark, nothing is left to honest people but to sleep" because one cannot see clearly what is there.[41]

Predictably, Pynchon critiques such a celebration of all-out illumination. Pynchon mourns that in the increasing "metropolitan Wakefulness," dreams and the fantastic are inhibited. Only in the penumbral and the dark, in the American west "ever behind the sunset," "out past the reach of civic Lanthorns,— … beyond, in the Forest, where the supernatural was less a matter of Publick-Room trickery or Amusement" can the marvelous be encountered.[42] While Wieland welcomes the "separation of the true and the false, the disentanglement of the entangled, the reduction of the composite into its simpler parts,"[43] Pynchon deplores the great loss of "changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicies that serve the end of Governments,"[44] which could almost be read as a rebuttal to Wieland. In other words, the fact that the luminosity of the Enlightenment nudges away the fantastic in favor of one transcendent and uncontestable truth is a triumph for the rationalists, but a tragedy for the romantics. Wieland's argumentation is also reminiscent of Plato's allegorized Enlightenment ideal to strive toward leaving the cave and its deceitful shadows and spirits in favor of seeing the world as it is. Philosophically, Hans Blumenberg's *Höhlenausgänge* (*Cave-Exits*; 1989) argues against Plato's proposition to abandon the cave for good, as "in the cover of the cave … fantasy emerged": dreams and fictions are "offspring of the cave."[45] Blumenberg writes further that it is the cave's shelter from gapless illumination when directly exposed to the sun, its protection against a sensory overload, that goads the imagination to narrate what is not there. The darkness of the cave invites sleep, but also dreams.

Such is the path of the Enlightenment, embodied by the West line, that ushers America out of its arcane cave. One can predict that this deforestation engenders the evanescence of the mythical and the oneiric, as Mason and Dixon had predicted before embarking on their journey. Back in Britain, Dixon had asked Mason why the Royal Society always chooses a "Factory, or Consulate, or other Agency" as their observation sites, to which Mason retorts: "Excuse me? you'd rather be dropp'd

blindly, into a Forest on some little-known Continent, perhaps?— no Perimeters,— nor indeed chances of surviving,— in-Tree-guing, as the Monkey said. I think not. Philosophick Work, to proceed at all smartly, wouldn't you agree, requires a controll'd working space."[46] Thus, in order to do their work, America is transformed into such a factory or consulate, where all perimeters are measured and recorded, and all movements are regulated and digitized—the opposite of walking freely and blindly through the forest. The "in-Tree-guing" is sacrificed for scientific clarity, "bringing with it the modern world's spiritual desperation," as Pynchon critic David Cowart puts it.[47] Indeed, Pynchon writes of one of nature's last acts of defiance, the "great Ghost of the woods" that warns them to proceed with what has long been exacerbated into intemperance as he whispers "no… no more… no further"—and it is indicative that such a fantastic intrusion occurs in the woods.[48]

Soon, Mason and Dixon become increasingly acquainted with the political, cultural, and ecological repercussions of the line. In addition to their realization that they cannot extricate themselves from these consequences, they also become aware of the extreme, one might even be tempted to call it absurd, deceleration: "*By this time, they're making a mile or two per day.* On the seventh of August, they cross Braddock's Road at 189 miles and 69 Chains. Thirty-two Chains further on, they cross the Road a second time. The next Day, a mile and 35 Chains beyond that, they cross it a Third Time." "I'm not content with this, Dixon, not at all," Mason notes. He then continues, exasperated, "Three months for Surveying!' Mason marvels. 'And if someone's been doing it all his Life? A-and think of the Money! Is that fifty Pounds per Act of surveying? Per Diem, perhaps?'"[49] This passage draws an immediate comparison to another famous expedition led by Meriweather Lewis and William Clark from May 1804 to September 1806. Based on their detailed travel logs, historian Stephen E. Ambrose reconstructs the itinerary of the Lewis and Clark expedition, offering a chronology of their movement. Ambrose at one point even comments on their speed: "On September 9[, 1806], the expedition passed the mouth of the Platte River. *It was making seventy to eighty miles a day.*"[50] The comparison of both passages explicitly reaffirms how substantially slower the Mason and Dixon expedition moves. In their respective speeds, the disparate purposes of the expeditions are reflected: Mason and Dixon are surveyors, while Lewis and Clark are explorers. Whereas Mason and Dixon are forced to comply with a prefabricated line that dictates their movement on the American West, Lewis and Clark are dispatched under the authority of Thomas Jefferson to explore new paths for mercantile interests; the order of exploration and map-making is therefore entirely inverted. The tragedy of Mason and Dixon's deceleration is at the verge of its dénouement, "as the Days of their Westering, even the most obtuse of the Company can see, are rapidly decremented, as in a game of Darts, to Zero, waiting moment upon moment the last fatal Double."[51] This is a mathematical image:

the graph of their progress is doomed to align with its "last fatal Double," its *asymptote*, which is the straight line that marks zero speed of westering.

Flying the Line

Shortly thereafter but before reaching the "last fatal Double," the Mason and Dixon expedition reaches a point where further ratiocination seems futile and meaningless. At that point, Pynchon suffuses the entire journey with an aura of romanticism, which reestablishes its momentum and introduces lofty and aerial movements. Science transforms into what would from an Enlightenment perspective be pejoratively called "pseudoscience," geometry is complemented by geomancy, as is astronomy by its counternarrative of astrology and geography by parageography. All these couples are amalgamations of science and romanticism, of the rational and the irrational, of the slow and the fast. The Chinese mystic Dr. Zhang constantly refers to the theory of ley lines and feng shui, reprimanding the two scientists for their invalid division of physical and metaphysical matters. The geometry of the Mason–Dixon line is susceptible to making such a division because it considers physical space exclusively. Philosopher Jeff Malpas writes, "Understanding the way in which creatures, including both human and non-human animals, find themselves 'in' space, both in relation to their bodies and to one another, requires more than just a concept of space as articulated within physical theory [such as geometry]. Moreover, … the restriction of focus that limits space to the physical and objective must also constitute a severe, indeed debilitating, restriction of any attempt to arrive at an adequate understanding of space and place."[52] Hence, cartographical geometry alone is ill-suited to grasping the spirit of western space. Dr. Zhang, alongside several other characters, constitutes a part of the force that attempts to counteract what Malpas calls the "debilitating restriction" on the merely measurable component of space.

One parageographical, romantic-scientific manifestation of Zhang's theories is the ley line. English antiquarian Alfred Watkins defines ley lines as "straight tracks-ways in prehistoric times in Britain," which are pathways of spiritual navigation in geomantic belief systems.[53] Accompanying Mason and Dixon, the narrator of the frame story Reverend Cherrycoke keeps a *Spiritual Day-Book*, the romantic counterpart to Mason and Dixon's technical journals, in which he extols the accelerations along ley lines: "Now, many is the philosophickal Mind,— including my own,— convinced that *rapid motion through the air* is possible along and above certain invisible straight Lines, crossing the earthly landscape, particularly in Britain, where they are known as *Ley-lines*. Any number of devout enthusiasts, annual Stonehenge and Avebury Pilgrims, Quacks, Mongers, Bedlamites,— each has his tale of *real flights* over the countryside, above these Ley-lines." Cherrycoke writes further that he believes the ley lines of America are more carefully composed by ancient mystical agents and there-

fore of even greater potency than English ones: "Here went we off upon the most prodigious Line yet attempted,— in America, where undertakings of its scale possible,— astronomically precise,— carefully set prisms of Oölite,—the Master-valve of rose Quarts, at the eastern Terminus. Any Argument from Design, here, must include *a yearning for Flight, perhaps even higher and faster* than is customary along Ley-lines we know. I try not to wonder. I must wonder."[54]

This geomantic belief in lofty and swift mobility that is "rapid" and "higher and faster" along a ley line finds its antipodal point in the immobility of the "creeping and crawling" survey expedition along the Mason-Dixon line. Predictably, as a girl chases a chicken, "an odd thing happens," as "directly upon the Line, the Chicken stops, . . . and thenceforward remains perfectly still, seemingly fallen into a Trance."[55] As everybody has a look at the "immobile Fowl," Mason surmises that "Right Lines cause Narcolepsy in *all* Fowl," generating a sinister prognosis that the orthogonalization of America renders free and lofty mobilities outright impossible.[56] However, if the Reverend Cherrycoke is right, ley lines perhaps retain the fantastic property of speedy transportation.[57] Similarly, Kathryn Hume points out that Pynchon "revels in telluric powers" exemplified by ley lines and feng shui, because they "suggest that Earth has living and non-material dimensions, and also that alternative realities exist beneath our feet as well as above us."[58] Hume sees the romantic dimension extend the profane monodimensionality of the line into a "beneath" and an "above," which Pynchon imbues with different speeds.

The preponderance of counternarratives to the techno-scientific one of the Mason-Dixon line exerts profound influence on Mason and Dixon. Shortly after Zhang's objections, Dixon is keen on expanding his knowledge into the territory of the romantic-scientific: "Dixon tries to learn from Capt. Zhang something of the *Luo-Pan*." The Luo-Pan is a feng shui compass, whose circumference measures 365.25° as opposed to the standard 360° "that the Jesuits remov'd from the Chinese circle."[59] By introducing the Luo-Pan, Pynchon proffers a radically different geometry in stark contrast to what Nina Engelhardt calls the "standard Enlightenment geometry."[60] This is reminiscent of Zhang's discussion of the "Eleven Days taken from your Calendar."[61] He alludes to the 1750 Calendar Act when Britain decreed the skipping of eleven days on September 2 in 1752, so that September 14 succeeded September 2 in order to readjust the miscalculations of the temporal length of a solar year, which is technically a little longer than 365 days.

In *Mason & Dixon*, the leaping of eleven days and the cutting of 5.25° from the Chinese Luo-Pan are not eliminated, but rather translocated into the realm of the romantic. Mason is able to gain access to the eleven missing days in a "Vortex . . . tangent to the Linear Path of what we imagine as Ordinary Time, but excluded from it,

and repeating itself,— without end." After his fantastic sojourn, he reports, "'Twas as if Metropolis of British Reason had been abandon'd to the Occupancy of all that Reason would deny. Malevolent shapes flowing in the Streets. Lanthorns spontaneously going out. Men roaring as if chang'd to Beasts in the Dark. A Carnival of Fear. Shall I admit it? I thrill'd. *I felt that if I ran fast enough, I could gain altitude, and fly.* I would become one of them. I could hide beneath Eaves as well as any. I could creep in the Shadows. I could belong to the D——l,— anything inside this Vortex was possible." Like the airborne mobilities that the ley lines bestow upon those who travel along them, the romantic vortex offers Mason a similarly speedy and lofty means of locomotion. Likewise, Dixon is able to enter a spherical space that might be the repository of the missing 5.25° of the broken Chinese circle: the Hollow Earth. His report of "inner-surface Philosophers" who might be "Gnomes, Elves, smaller folk" is reminiscent of Mason's fantastic account of the vortex; and since the Hollow Earth's "Light . . . was never more than low and diffuse," analogous to the "Shadows" encountered in the vortex, one can regard them as instantiations of Blumenberg's cave utopias, twilit subterfuges against rationality's prying eyes.[62] Mason and Dixon's erstwhile scientific hesitation upon their encounter with the Learnèd English Dog has evaporated: they believe these two spaces to be real. This is a well-known arc in fantastic literature; Todorov reserves the term "adaptation" for the event, in which the fantastic is entirely encapsulated by the natural. The narrative

> starts from a supernatural event, and during the course of the narrative gives it an increasingly natural atmosphere—until at the end, the story has gone as far as possible from the supernatural. Thereby all hesitation becomes useless: its function had been to prepare the way for the perception of the unheard-of event, and to characterize the transition from natural to supernatural. Here, it is a contrary movement which is described: that of *adaptation*, which follows the inexplicable event and which characterizes the transition from the supernatural to the natural. Hesitation and adaptation designate symmetrical and converse processes.[63]

Through the development of Mason and Dixon as characters, the transition from the scientific—the paradigm of hesitation, for example when encountering the Learnèd English Dog—to the romantic—the paradigm of adaptation, in which the fantastic is unquestionably part of the real—is brought to the fore.

It is important to note, however, that these fantastic spaces do not survive explanations or measurements in the scientific sense; like Todorov's definition suggests, the fantastic is a fragile construct liable to collapse once it is exposed as sheer fantasy or explained away. Similarly, Dixon is warned in the Hollow Earth: "Once the solar parallax is known, . . . once the necessary Degrees are measur'd, and the size and weight of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last, all this will vanish. We will have

to seek another Space."[64] The fact that these two adventures could occur to Mason and Dixon in the first place must mean that both have relaxed their scientific rigor in order to be more responsive to the wonders of the world; they have veered away from the line's predestined path.[65] This has a momentous impact on their mobility as well. As mentioned above, Mason felt that he could "gain altitude, and fly" and Dixon reports that, owing to the Hollow Earth's concave topology, "to journey anywhere, in this *Terra Concava*, is ever to ascend."[66] Both instances suggest that such transcendent mobilities—now directed an upward as in Mason's flying and Dixon's ascending—require their joint renunciation of the simplistic Mason–Dixon line.

In a final episode, when, historically, Mason and Dixon are finished with their line-drawing and return eastward, Pynchon offers an imaginary alternative history in which the ghosts of Mason and Dixon proceed in their westward journey. If romanticism was ever under threat of subjugation by science, it is now the opposite: the entire chapter constitutes a pure act of Pynchon's imagination and is not substantiated by any historical evidence. The ghosts of Mason and Dixon feel "the Need to keep…no fix'd place, rather a fix'd motion,— Westering. Whenever they do stop moving, like certain Stars in Chinese Astrology, they lose their Invisibility, and revert to the indignity of being observ'd and available again for earthly purposes." Science is an ill-suited tool to explain this mobility; their invisiblity precludes any measurement or observation and defies the laws of physics. In this imaginary "westering," the romantic caravan finds its mobility and speed *enhanced* by the Mason–Dixon line: "Far enough west, they have outrun the slowly branching Seep of Atlantic settlement, and begun to encounter town from elsewhere, coming their way, with entirely different Histories,— Cathedrals, Spanish Musick in the Streets, Chinese Acrobats and Russian Mysticks. Soon, the Line's own *Vis Inertiæ* having been brought up to speed, they discover additionally that 'tis *it*, now transporting *them*."[67] This is the romantic climax of the novel because it is a movement that has never taken place as far as historical documents suggest, but is, if anything, a realization of both Cherrycoke's "Dream,—… that I flew, some fifty to an hundred feet above the Surface, down the Visto, straight West" and Mason and Dixon's joint "dream of going on [west], unhinder'd, as the Halt dream of running, the Earth-bound of flying."[68] Pynchon's salient use of words such as "outrun," "speed," "running," and "flying" not only points to the importance of the numerous modalities of movement, which are too often neglected in accounts of explorations and mapmakings of the American West, but also to their transformed, quick, breezy, and especially airborne mobility after the journey has become a romantic quest rather than a mere exercise in surveying. In comparison to the previous section regarding the solely scientifically motivated movement that will decelerate until it is completely stalled, meeting its asymptotic "last fatal Double," the romantic continuation reinvigorates and elevates the movement of Mason and Dixon in two

senses: it increases their speed and raises their movement to the heights.

However, even this romantic episode must end on a less metaphysical note. The ghosts of Mason and Dixon eventually choose to turn "back to certain Fortune and global Acclaim" after their discovery of Uranus in lieu of "continu[ing] West, away from the law," which is to move "contrary to Reason, against the Day." By constrast, moving east is to cherish light and Enlightenment, "the less subjunctive," and, moreover, the light of public attention, as upon moving east, the ghosts of Mason and Dixon, losing their invisibility, materialize into celebrated historical actualities.[69] Thus, Pynchon's novel is deeply aware of the fact that it cannot change the American wrongdoings or atrocities of the past, but it can underscore that which has been forgotten, ignored, or removed by modern historiography in the form of the fantastic. *Mason & Dixon* shows that the fantastic cannot be destroyed, only explained away and translocated into different realms. Used in that way, analogous to Todorov's description, the fantastic functions as a critique of the given reality. The fact that Pynchon superimposes dreams of fantastically lofty and speedy mobilities along the Mason–Dixon line upon the actual Mason-Dixon line intimates what should have happened as opposed to what has happened: Mason and Dixon's curiosity should have propelled them farther into the west,ultimately denying their service to the British Crown's ill-starred geometry by using their telescopes and sextants on their own accord instead.

Such a dual discussion of the im/mobilities related to the line reminds the reader of the foundational American ideal of free and unbounded movements, like the unconditional reception of migrants and refugees in this "great American asylum," outlined in J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's "What is an American?" (1782).[70] Simultaneously, it excoriates how blatantly mobility as such is compromised by what many characters at first erroneously regard as an innocuous surveying expedition, including Mason and Dixon themselves. For Pynchon, the nostalgically utopian, genuinely American mobility is one of inclusion; the continent welcomes anyone regardless of cultural or ethnic background, provides shelter to those in need and forbids lines of separation:

> When the Hook of Night is well set, and when all the Children are at last irretrievably detain'd within their Dreams, slowly into the Room begin to walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese Sailors, the overflow'd from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia,– as if something outside, beyond the cold Wind, has driven them to this extreme of seeking refuge. They bring their Scars, their Pox-pitted Cheeks, their Burdens and Losses, their feverish Eyes, their proud fellowship in a Mobility that is to be, whose shape none inside this House may know.[71]

Here, a "Mobility that is to be" means the auspicious beginning of the United States of America, where caravan-esque moving-together represents the cornerstone of

its founding idea. Reminding the reader of this, *Mason & Dixon* shows that it is eminently desirable for a society to be vigilant about forces like the Mason-Dixon line that could undermine this mobility.

Notes

1 Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka: A Prose Poem," in *Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 803.

2 Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 214.

3 Mason and Dixon also run a series of auxiliary lines in order to establish the exact latitude of the Mason–Dixon line, also known as the East–West line or sometimes abbreviated as the West line. From their *Journals*, one can extrapolate that they cover 230.223 miles (West line) + 14.252 miles (East line) + 81.979 miles (Tangent line) + 1.452 miles (Arc line) + 3.568 miles (North line) = 331.373 miles. Considering they were running the lines from December 1763 to October 1767, which approximately comprises 1426 days (or 34224 hours), we calculate that they moved at an average speed of 0.00967 mph (0.01557 kph). Multiplying that speed by two yields about 0.02 mph (0.032 kph), which acknowledges all compulsory moments of stasis, such as resting and eating.

4 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 12.

5 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 22, 27.

6 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.

7 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 317.

8 On the basis of his historical research, David Foreman concludes that the "investigation of the author's sources reveals a surprising degree of factual basis to his fiction." David Foreman, "Historical Documents Relating to *Mason & Dixon*," in *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon, ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 143. Furthermore, playing with fact and fiction is a hallmark conceit of many postmodern authors when dealing with historical topics, for which Linda Hutcheon has reserved the apt term "historiographic metafiction" in her book *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988).

9 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 669.

10 Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 173.

11 David Cowart identifies in Pynchon a "hunger of disruptive presence within the Age of Reason" prevalent in the eighteenth century. Through elements of "Gothicism and Romanticism," Pynchon installs "manifestations of resistance to an untrammeled Enlightenment narrative." David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon & The Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 140.

12 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 246, 298, 298.

13 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 333.

14 Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, *The Journal of Mason and Dixon*, 1763, 8, *Internet Archive*, May 6, 2019, https://archive.org/details/JournalOfMasonAndDixon.

15 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 333–34.

16 Genette defines "the speed of a narrative [as] the relationship between a duration (that of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years) and a length (that of the text, measured in lines and in pages)." Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 87.

17 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 340.

18 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 340, 467.

19 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 441, 441, 334, 444.

20 The "Chains" refer to Gunter's chain, a measurement device whose namesake is the English mathematician Edmund Gunter. It is the "English standard measurement unit," as historian Edwin Danson writes. Edward Danson, *Drawing the Line* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 28. Measuring in "Chains" indicates how colonial metrics and geometries tessellate the American surface and through a poetics of metal hint at the imminent industrialization of America. Measuring America thus becomes equivalent to imposing "Chains" upon America, which, as the name suggests, impairs mobility by inhibiting the American ideal of free and borderless movement.

21 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 317.

22 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 573.

23 For a more detailed exploration of the connection between smooth/striated space and Pynchon's America, see Leyla Haferkamp, "Prairie: Pynchon's Poetics of Immanence," in *Deleuzian Events: Writing | History*, ed. Hanjo Berressem and Leyla Haferkamp (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009).

24 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 573.

25 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 324.

26 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 446, 452, 505.

27 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 324, 335, 446, 447.

28 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 353.

29 Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 29.

30 Brian Edwards, "Surveying 'America': In the Mnemonick Deep of Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," *Australian Journal of American Studies* 23, no. 2 (2004): 27.

31 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 453, 637.

32 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 636.

33 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 331.

34 Mason and Dixon, *Journals*, 9.

35 Mason and Dixon, *Journals*, 147, 38.

36 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 335, 444.

37 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 441, 339, 462.

38 Brian McHale, "*Mason & Dixon* in the Zone, or, A Brief Poetics of Pynchon-Space," in *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon, ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving Malin (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000); Victor Strandberg, "Diminishing the Enlightenment: Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," in *Pynchon and* Mason & Dixon, ed. Brooke Horvath and Irving

Malin (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000); Edwards, "Surveying America."

39 Hanjo Berressem, "Criticism & Pynchon & *Mason & Dixon*," *Contemporary Literature* 42, no. 4 (2001): 838, DOI: 10.2307/1209056.

40 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 678; emphasis added.

41 Christoph Martin Wieland, "Sechs Fragen zur Aufklärung," in *Was ist Aufklärung?*, ed. Eberhard Bahr (Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1986), 23; translations by the author of this article.

42 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 345, 345, 411.

43 Wieland, "Sechs Fragen," 25.

44 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 345.

45 Hans Blumenberg, *Höhlenausgänge* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 30, 29.

46 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 252.

47 David Cowart, "The Luddite Vision: *Mason & Dixon*," *American Literature* 71, no. 2 (1999): 342.

48 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 634.

49 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 658; emphasis added.

50 Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriweather Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 402; emphasis added.

51 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 664.

52 Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 48.

53 Alfred Watkins, *The Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites, and Mark Stones* (London: Methuen & Co., 1948), xvi.

54 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 440, 400; emphases added.

55 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 665. Here, Pynchon alludes to the riddle joke "Why did the chicken cross the road?" commonly answered with "to get to the other side." However, the Mason–Dixon line is so powerful a restraint to mobility that the chicken cannot get to the other side at all.

56 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 665.

57 Note also that Cherrycoke technically could not have had knowledge of ley lines because the idea was developed chiefly in twentieth century Europe by Alfred Watkins. Pynchon implicitly testifies to the spiritual significance of Cherrycoke's writings by pointing out their prophetic quality. Mitchum Huehls analyzes this "parallactic narrative form" in more detail in "'The Space that may not be seen': The Form of Historicity in Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* Mason & Dixon*: Eighteenth-Century Contexts, Postmodern Observations*, ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005).

58 Kathryn Hume, "*Mason & Dixon*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman, and Brian McHale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64.

59 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 587, 629.

60 Nina Engelhardt, *Modernism, Fiction and Mathematics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 44.

61 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 629.

62 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 629, 560, 740; emphasis added.

63 Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 170.

64 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 741.

65 Reconsidering Mason's statement that the vortex is "tangent to the Linear Path of . . . Ordinary Time," one can find a parallelism to the linear path of the Mason–Dixon line as both an organization of spatial and timely linearity, also found in for instance history. Pynchon similarly steps out of the historical account of the Mason–Dixon line in order to tell the fantastic stories tangent to the line that are too often disregarded by Enlightenment historiography, which is committed to facts. For more thorough discussions of this issue, see Hume, "*Mason & Dixon*," Huehls, "The Form of Historicity," and Hanjo Berressem and Norbert Finzsch, "Historiographic Metafiction/Metafictional Historiography: The *Mason & Dixon* Project," in *Approaches to Teaching Pynchon's* The Crying of Lot 49 *and Other Works*, ed. Thomas H. Schaub (New York: Modern Language Association, 2008).

66 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 560, 740.

67 Pynchon, Mason & Dixon, 707, 708.

68 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 649, 677.

69 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 709, 709, 683, 683.

70 J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, "What Is an American?" in *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 68.

71 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 759; emphases added.

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William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*

A Chronicle of Im/Mobilities

Leonardo Nolé

Abstract

William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942) focuses on what the author calls the "earth's long chronicle," a century-long story about an imaginary and truthful land of the American South. In this article, I show how this chronicle is built on the idea of "im/mobility," considered from different perspectives. First, the seven stories that form *Go Down, Moses* depict various forms of exploitation, the effects induced by time and human movements on fields, woods, and animals, underlying the contrast between an "immobile" wilderness and a "mobile" (tamed, exploited) plantation. Second, these stories follow the destiny of im/mobile people who inhabit the land—like Ike McCaslin, the most prominent character, who is blamed precisely for his "immobility," i.e. his inability to take action and change the status quo, at the end of the story. Finally, the literary form of *Go Down, Moses* contains the idea of "im/mobility" in its hybrid and fragmented structure, halfway between a novel and a short story collection.

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William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*

A Chronicle of Im/Mobilities

Leonardo Nolé

"But Isaac was not one of these:—a widower these twenty years, who in all his life had owned but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and his hands at one time . . . who owned no property and never desired to since the earth was no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were."[1] From the very beginning of his *Go Down, Moses* (1942), William Faulkner highlights some of the fundamental themes developed in this complex text, which took him almost two years to write. The author starts by introducing Ike McCaslin, the human character who has long attracted readers' and scholars' attention, because of his "mobile," i.e., contradictory and ambiguous, traits—he, in fact, inherits a plantation and then renounces it; he swears to respect all people and finally repudiates his Black descendant; he recognizes the social and environmental violence of his time and never actively resists it. But immediately following this, Faulkner names the true protagonist of *Go Down, Moses* that holds together other intertwined stories of mobility: the earth. In this text, Faulkner not only records the vicissitudes of a family, the McCaslins, but also gives voice, as he himself wrote, to the "earth's long chronicle,"[2] that is to say, to almost a century of U.S. history (1860–1940) through the stories germinating in an imaginary but verisimilar territory in the South of the United States, the famous Yoknapatawpha County.

By following this material and more-than-human chronicle, this article will focus on *Go Down, Moses*'s depiction of various social and technological forms of mobility, taking them as a fundamental component of Faulkner's discussion of the exploitation of both people and land. On the one hand, I will build on recent discussions in mobility studies, useful for examining Faulkner's representation of the inequalities in social mobility and the American "uneven national movement toward industrialization, urbanization, and consumerism."[3] On the other, my discussion will be informed by the readings of scholars such as Lawrence Buell and Judith B. Wittenberg, who were

the first to recognize a sort of ecological attention *ante litteram* in Faulkner's book. Far from being just a beautiful landscape in the background, the natural world of *Go Down, Moses* is subject to the intervention of time and human beings, offering the opportunity to explore the cultural meanings behind the main forms of modern mobility and their relationship with modernity at large. It is not by chance, I will argue, that Faulkner chooses a "mobile" literary genre to represent this complex discourse. Halfway between a novel and a collection of short stories, *Go Down, Moses*'s structure becomes a fundamental element in fully understanding Faulkner's idea of the "earth's long chronicle."

Mobility of Form: A Non-Chronological Chronicle

The earth Faulkner puts at the center of the text is inhabited and worked by the McCaslin-Edmonds-Beauchamp family, a mix of white landowners and Black workers, whose threefold lineage can be understood only after reading all of the stories in the text. The first one, "Was," takes place in 1859 and centers on Uncle Buck's and Uncle Buddy's pursuit of one of their Black workers, Tomey's Turl, as well as Sophonisba Beauchamp's machinations to become Uncle Buck's wife. This is followed by "The Fire and the Hearth," set in 1941 and focusing on Lucas, Tomey's Turl's son, his feverish search for a hidden treasure impossible to find, and the subsequent difficult relationship with his wife, Molly. "Pantaloon in Black," still set in 1941, is the only story that is not directly linked to the McCaslin family, since it follows the despair of one of the plantation's Black workers, Rider, after his wife's death. The next three stories, "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn," follow different moments in Ike McCaslin's life, spanning the years between 1877 and 1940, through some important milestones: his so-called "initiation" into the wilderness; his long bear hunting in the woods; his discovery of his grandfather Carothers McCaslin's terrible crimes; his challenging decision to renounce the plantation; and finally, grown old, the betrayal of his progressive ideals. The last story gives the title to the whole text, "Go Down, Moses," taking place around 1940 and recalling the death of Samuel Beauchamp (grandson of Lucas and Molly—here Mollie—already encountered in the second story), who is banished from the plantation and accused of killing a policeman, followed by his grandmother's and a white lawyer's attempt to bring his body home.

Even this essential and inevitably incomplete summary may be enough to understand how interlinked the different stories of *Go Down, Moses* are and how complex the writing process must have been. Despite publishing some of the stories in magazines earlier, Faulkner carefully reworked the previously written material in order to unify the tone of the narrative and make it consistent.[4] Such careful labor corresponds to a precise awareness of the peculiar literary form chosen for this text, which the author on several occasions called a novel.[5] "I remember the shock (mild) I

got when I saw the printed title page," Faulkner explained, referring to the first edition published by Random House in 1942 and titled *Go Down, Moses and Other Stories*. "I say, reprint it, call it simply *Go Down, Moses*, which was the way I sent it in to you."[6] The confusion caused by the unusual structure of the book is confirmed by critical responses. While the initial reviewers simply considered this work a collection of short stories, some others went as far as to call it a "literary hybrid," a "loosely constructed novel," or even a "storied novel."[7] More recently, this text has been rightly included among those critical works that, since the 1970s, have helped to recognize and define the short story composite (or short story cycle), a hybrid literary genre where independent stories work together to comprise a more ambitious design, which asks to be read as one.

This is not the place to investigate the short story composite in detail, but it may be useful to mention some of its fundamental characteristics that are particularly important for *Go Down, Moses*'s composition and its exploration of various forms of mobility.[8] The first one is its "dialectic" working mechanism, in which the stories remain individual entities, complete in themselves, while starting at the same time a dialogue with the other parts and the text as a whole. As a result, each part (story) has the possibility of progressively modifying the meaning of the whole (novel) and vice versa. According to Forrest L. Ingram, "Like the *moving* parts of a *mobile*, the interconnected parts of some story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts, as the cycle *moves* forward in its typical pattern of recurrent development."[9] By building on what Ian C. Davidson calls "mobility of form," it becomes clear that the idea of movement is already there in the way short story composites work and create meaning, as well as in the way readers are encouraged to interact with the text.[10]

One of the consequences of this peculiar structure and "working mechanism" is that the protagonist of the composite is almost always collective, made of all the single protagonists of each story. It can be shaped as a family, a community, or a collectivity variously defined.[11] In *Go Down, Moses*, the collective protagonist not only consists of some members of the McCaslin family, but it soon comes to embrace the whole county and its inhabitants. This focus on many equally important protagonists belonging to all levels of society reinforces the representation of disparities in social mobility as well as the impact that the various forms of human and technological mobilities have on the environment over the course of a century.

In addition, the structure of the short story composite supports the peculiar form of chronicle that Faulkner achieves in the book. The author's recollection of the events is in fact non-chronological; his stories continuously interrupt, move freely back and forth in time, and introduce new characters and/or events without fully

contextualizing them. The question that Jean-Paul Sartre asks when discussing *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is particularly useful here—"why has Faulkner broken up the time of his story and scrambled the pieces?"—because the most spontaneous reaction to Faulkner's problematic narrative of time would be to underestimate or deny the role of temporality in the text.[12] However, according to Sartre, this is a mistake, which comes from the common but simplistic equation between temporality and chronology. "Normally we associate 'reality' with *chronos*," Frank Kermode confirms, "and a fiction which entirely ignored this association we might think unserious or silly or mad."[13] By contrast, William Faulkner's non-chronological chronicle in *Go Down, Moses* helps to depict the social reality of a specific historical time, thanks to a focus on the correlation and interdependence between present and past. According to Sartre, "Faulkner's vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backwards. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings, faint tremblings and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterwards, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars."[14] Sartre's "impressionist image" explains that Faulkner's chronicle juxtaposes and combines past and present in order to provide an alternative and more complete explanation of the events and their social and historical contexts. Moreover, the fact that Sartre uses the image of a car to represent Faulkner's philosophy of time is particularly interesting for this discussion of the various forms of mobility in *Go Down, Moses*. In Sartre's words, the car comes to symbolize a modern version of time that favors speed over the possibility of gazing and understanding. Everything is consumed so quickly that it is impossible to immediately think about consequences and implications. In *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner discusses the concept and effects of modern mobilities on several levels, and his choice of a non-chronological chronicle can be seen as a preliminary criticism of a time based solely on progress and speed—that is to say, on consumption and exploitation. By contrast, the various human protagonists of *Go Down, Moses* seem to be always tied to their past, to an uninterrupted chain of sins and mistakes. According to Gerhard Hoffmann, this book is, in fact, held together "by the repetition of these misdeeds up to the time at which the novel was written by the continuous obsession with blood, inheritance, and possession, a circle of unexpiated guilt which weighs as a burden on all the old Southerners."[15] This is why Faulkner's personal "chronicle of the earth" becomes a useful instrument to investigate time and its major problems, starting with the representation of social im/mobilities and the resulting inequalities.

Social Im/Mobilities: A Chronicle of Inequalities

Go Down, Moses variously explores the concept of social im/mobility through its several protagonists and their complex genealogy. In particular, Faulkner uses charac-

ters belonging to different social groups to investigate the human longing for possessions, power, and liberty. As a result, he problematizes the American "assumption that socio-economic mobility is available to all."[16] For instance, in the second story, titled "The Fire and the Hearth," the protagonist Lucas Beauchamp is a descendant of the mixed-race branch of the McCaslin family and employed as a plantation laborer. Lucas, however, knows that "it was his own field, though he neither owned it nor wanted to nor even needed to," and he can in fact perform an illegal activity demonstrating that he owns it "more" than his white masters.[17] His illusory longing for possession comes to the fore when he finds a gold coin buried in the earth: being convinced that it is the first part of a great treasure, he starts spending his nights digging while risking divorce from his wife Molly and embarking on a dangerous confrontation with the white landowner.

Lucas's father, Tomey's Turl, a Black worker at the plantation, embodies the idea of social mobility in a more symbolic way. He is at the same time son and grandson of Carothers McCaslin, the result of an act of violence and incest that the progenitor of the McCaslin family perpetrated on the illegitimate daughter (Tomasina) through one of his Black slaves (Eunice). In "Was," Tomey's Turl escapes from the plantation to visit Tennie, a slave of the Beauchamps whom he intends to marry. His escape works as a sort of "game," which symbolizes his repeated efforts to gain liberty and emancipation. It is no coincidence that the original meaning of the word "liberty" is precisely freedom of physical movement. As Thadious M. Davis underlines, this character is "represented in motion, in action, and thus as an agent, even though his agency is constrained by . . . the racist ideology informing the conception of 'nigger' and enslaved property."[18] Thanks to his movement and behavior, to his dreams of social mobility, "he accomplishes a deregulation of the ownership claims and property rights," and he "articulates a narrative by means of motion and action."[19]

Among the white masters, Ike McCaslin epitomizes immobility. In the fourth section of "The Bear," Ike is in the wooden cabin where his family has always stored the ledgers that keep track of the movements of products, money, and slaves. While reading these old records, he finds the proof of the rape and incest committed by his grandfather, Carothers McCaslin. What strikes Ike beyond the atrocious actions themselves is precisely the idea of possession, of both the land and the slaves. In his family's view, as the ledgers report, the Black workers are nothing more than bought, sold, and occasionally lost "goods."[20] In this instance, Faulkner's narrative comes to embrace a broader perspective, exceeding the McCaslin story. From being a sort of family journal, the ledgers turn into "the continuation of that record which two hundred years had not been enough to complete and another hundred would not be enough to discharge; that *chronicle* which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South."[21] In other words, the stories of Eunice,

Tomasina, Tomey's Turl, and the other Black workers of the plantation epitomize slavery in the United States. According to Abdul-Razzak Al-Barhow, "the book achieves a 'measure of victory' in the way its narrative techniques acknowledge and respect the otherness of black people, and, more importantly, in the way it maintains the determination to subvert the codes of the Southern racial ideology by both white and black characters."[22]

Ike McCaslin begins to view his white privilege as a fortuitous, yet regrettable, coincidence, "the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame."[23] Ike's renunciation stems precisely from this awareness and results in two main forms of "social" immobility. On the one hand, the repudiation of the land entails the end of his lineage. In a powerful moment in "The Bear," Ike's wife is so interested in taking his property and so angry at Ike for his decision to give it away that she suddenly denies any intimacy with him. "That's all from me," she says, "if this dont get you that son you talk about, it wont be mine."[24] On the other hand, Ike's act of renunciation does not lead to any real societal change because it is itself a form of immobility.

By incorporating "The Bear" into the composite novel, Faulkner revises its optimism by connecting it to the following chapter, "Delta Autumn." Ike is now an old man without a family when he meets with a young woman visiting his mansion. She is there to convince Roth Edmonds, the son of the cousin to whom Ike has bequeathed the entire plantation, to finally marry her and acknowledge their son. When Ike perceives the woman's African American origins, his answer is imperative: "Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now! . . . You're a nigger!"[25] With this statement, the hopeful attitude that had distinguished Ike as a young man vanishes. By expressing the impossibility of social mobility for a Black woman of his time, Ike cowardly suggests a different kind of movement. In the subsequent exchange, he offers her some money and advises her to go away, to the north, to look for a husband "in her own race," forgetting the McCaslin family and her dreams of equality.[26] Even if the narrator does not highlight his presence, the child the woman holds in her arms plays a key role in this scene. The young woman is the last descendant of Tomey's Turl, the Black man born from Carothers McCaslin's incest. The child, then, unites two different branches of the family: the legitimate and illegitimate children, the white and Black descendants, who have been divided up to this point by a terrible story of violence and abuse. Old Ike knows that this child embodies the reconciliation of the family, yet he nonetheless repudiates him.[27] This—Ike's latest mistake—again takes the form of a renunciation—of both the property, left to those who did nothing but repeat the same mistakes of the past, and of the new lineage, banished and never welcomed. In a way, here Ike seems to perceive the idea of mobil-

ity as a threat. "In response to this threat," Stephan Greenblatt writes in his "Mobility Studies Manifesto" (2010), "many groups and individuals have attempted to wall themselves off from the world."[28] The future to which the young Ike McCaslin once aspired has drifted further and further away because he has never actively committed himself to achieving it.[29] According to Thadious M. Davis, Ike "can forcefully resist evil in society only if he acts; passivity is no solution, because it cannot generate a social reformation."[30] When asked to comment on Ike's behavior, Faulkner seems to support this reading as he explains that Ike is the kind of person who says, "This is bad, and I will withdraw from it," whereas the world would need people who say, "This is bad, and I'm going to do something about it. I'm going to change it."[31]

The final story of the book, "Go Down, Moses," no longer focuses on Ike McCaslin. Because of his "immobility," his role is clearly over.[32] Ike's "lack of concern for [the] future interests of the community" does not follow the direction the book takes at this point.[33] This story appears to speak to the future, showing the first, hesitant examples of equality. Although the victim is still a young Black man punished for a crime he actually committed, the help provided by certain white characters in bringing the corpse home and ensuring him a decent funeral becomes a sort of "act of expiation" from the white community for the first time.[34] And although the editor of the local newspaper mocks Mollie for asking him to write about her grandson's killing, race relations are now starting to change. "The Fire and the Hearth" stresses that Lucas Beauchamp, as a Black slave, did not have the right to personally submit a complaint to the judge; in the fourth section of "The Bear," Black workers not only had no voice in the records kept by the McCaslin family, but they would have never asked to read them.[35] Here, by contrast, their descendants have moved forward and developed a new courage, which allows them to ask for attention, to demand that their words will appear in writing next to those of the white people. Through her grandson's story, Mollie demands the legacy of slavery be published in the newspaper, as a way to begin publicly addressing racial inequality and injustice.[36]

Mobility and Technological Innovations: A Chronicle of Exploitation

The same uncontrollable longing for possession and power that sustains the practice and institutionalization of slavery can be found in the characters' relationships with the natural world.[37] One of Ike McCaslin's hunting companions in "The Bear," Boon, of partial Chickasaw and European descent, never killed any prey before Old Ben, the "mythical" bear representing the wilderness. Ike and the other hunters had several opportunities to shoot Old Ben, and they had always abstained from doing it. Like a sort of extended ritual, the hunt had, in fact, lasted for years. But Boon's desire to

prevail becomes irrepressible, inevitably driving him to madness. When Ike returns to the forest some time after the killing of the bear, he finds his friend seated against the trunk of a tree full of squirrels, with a disassembled gun in his hands, only able to shout at him: "Get out of here! Don't touch them! Don't touch a one of them! They're mine."[38]

Before discussing how Faulkner represents the technological changes required by human mobility and their effect on the natural world in his narrative, I would like to mention other examples of *Go Down, Moses*'s explicit critique of the culture that prompts and directs these changes. For instance, Boon's story draws attention to an activity Faulkner discusses extensively and which becomes an ambiguous symbol of the human yearning for possession: the practice of hunting. As Judith B. Wittenberg and Lawrence Buell point out, this is a sort of *file rouge* that complicates the concept of movement in *Go Down, Moses*, while interlinking almost every story in the text in different ways, from the hunt for Tomey's Turl, the fugitive slave in "Was," and the hunt for the buried money in "The Fire and the Hearth," to the search for the young man's corpse in "Go Down, Moses."[39]

In the three stories focusing on Ike McCaslin, "The Old People," "The Bear," and "Delta Autumn," the author lingers on traditional hunting expeditions. As Faulkner presents it, hunting is simultaneously a game, a form of entertainment but also an activity with serious consequences.[40] Surprisingly to a contemporary reader, Faulkner's hunters are often those who care about the woods and their preservation. In one important scene of "The Bear," for example, Major De Spain, one of the regular members of Ike's hunting party, forces the train that crosses the forest to stop in order to save a passing bear.[41] Moreover, throughout *Go Down, Moses*, the hunt becomes a symbol of life and growth. This is why Sam Fathers says to his disciple Ike in "The Old People": "You wait. You'll be a hunter. You'll be a man," establishing a direct, meaningful relation between these two conditions.[42] Faulkner explained that in "The Bear," "the hunt was simply a symbol of pursuit . . . I was simply telling something which was, in this case, . . . the compulsion of the child to adjust to the adult world . . . to catch, to touch, and then let go because then tomorrow you can pursue again . . . The pursuit is the thing, not the reward, not the gain."[43] The child named here is Ike McCaslin, whose story begins very much like a *Bildungsroman* in which the natural environment plays a key role in the development of the protagonist.[44] As Faulkner writes, "If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself . . . was his alma mater."[45] In the woods, Ike is assisted by his "human" guide, Sam Fathers—who teaches him a different relationship with nature—and by the mythical and symbolic presence of the bear, Old Ben. Both examples allow Ike to reach a higher degree of awareness that escapes most of his family members and contemporaries.

For example, Ike understands that, unlike human beings, "the earth dont want to just keep things, hoard them; it wants to use them again," that is, he learns lessons he attempts to apply to his own life.[46] In a more general manner, it could be said that an entirely new set of values develops within him, beginning with innocence and respect for otherness, which he had yet to encounter in society.

In the fourth section of "The Bear," Ike's new consciousness is tested via a long dialogue with his cousin. Ike, who is now twenty-one years old and therefore the fully entitled heir to the plantation, seems to understand the consequences of the human presence on the land. From the very beginning of the discussion, Ike contrasts the wilderness with the plantation, the "tamed land which was to have been his heritage."[47] The wilderness has its own rules and rhythms, he explains, and above all it is immobile because it is not meant to produce profit.[48] Ike experiences it during his first meeting with Old Ben: "Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, *immobile*, *fixed* . . . Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness *without motion* as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the dark depths of its pool and vanish *without even any movement* of its fins."[49] To Ike, human logic is antithetical to this idea of wilderness because human logic is always directed to action and consumption. Unlike the rest of his family, he takes the opportunity to join the wilderness and realizes how human work turns that free land into the tamed land of the plantation. For this reason, he blames the McCaslins' progenitor, Carothers, for having treated the earth as a mere commodity at his disposal, for having monetized, subjugated, and exploited it.

Go Down, Moses critically explores this idea of possession and exploitation of the natural world also through its depiction of different forms of human and technological mobility. As John Urry notes, "The human 'mastery' of nature has been most effectively achieved through movement over, under, and across it."[50] The hunting expeditions in the woods are an intrusive form of human mobility, since they are a sort of race, an action that—before anything else—disrupts the same idea of the immobility of the wilderness.[51] Ike fails to realize it, but, as a human being, he, too, is an agent of that progress and change he would have never wanted to see in the wilderness. And in fact, even when he goes deeper and deeper into the woods to look for Old Ben and abandons his "human" tools (gun, clock, and compass), he forgets to leave behind the most powerful agent of civilization—himself.[52] Even when he is simply walking through the woods, Ike still performs a human activity, since "there is nothing natural about walking."[53] This last example, together with Ike's idea that the woods can be taught, that nature can be taken as a source of life lessons, that people can use the earth well, look very much like a less audacious version of that longing for possession and exploitation that has always characterized the chronicle of the earth.[54]

Another ambiguous symbol of human presence and movement in the natural world is the train. Returning several years later to the same wilderness that had guided him in his "initiation," Ike finds it irreparably changed. A new factory covers acres of forest and the small railroad, formerly considered to be harmless, has become something different, "as though the train . . . had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill not even finished yet and the rails and ties which were not even laid."[55] Faulkner's rich prose explains the cultural change behind the success of railroads around the world. In John Urry's words, "The railway restructures the existing relation between nature, time, and space" while it turns "places into a system of circulation, transforming what had been distinct places into commodities."[56] In "Delta Autumn," in particular, the old Ike looks at the land he once knew and has seen change, realizing that "now the land lay open from the cradling hills on the East to the rampart of levee on the West, standing horseman-tall with cotton for the world's loom . . . the land across which there came now no scream of panther but instead the long hooting of locomotives."[57] Railways, roads, sawmills, plantations, growing cities, multinational corporations: the natural world depicted by Faulkner is not only mediated by literary lenses, by a sort of mythical, poetic gaze at the beauty of the wilderness, but it is also embedded in the environmental actuality of a capitalist society.[58]

As a final step in this material chronicle of various means of transportation, in "Delta Autumn," the attention is likewise focused on cars. The narrator underlines the fact that Ike belongs to a distant past because "he was the last of those who had once made the journey [to the hunting grounds] in wagons." By contrast, "now they went in cars, driving faster and faster each year because the roads were better and they had further and further to drive."[59] Traveling by car is depicted as a completely different kind of journey: faster and therefore able to cover greater distances. When reflecting on it, Ike notes not only the changes in the natural landscape, but also in the roads, which from the small paths traced by the deer have now become large roads that connect different cities. In order to get to the hunting grounds, however, Ike and his companions must leave the paved road and adapt to a slower kind of movement. The change in speed corresponds to the possibility of Ike reactivating other memories, marking his diversity in a more and more evident way. This is one of the few occasions in which Ike's "immobility," his attachment to a past now too distant, seems to present a positive meaning for Faulkner. In fact, when the horses to be used for the hunting expedition are freed from their truck, Ike is the only human able to calm them down because he is "insulated by his years and time from the corruption of steel and oiled moving parts which tainted the others."[60]

Conclusion

The different means of transportation and their cultural significance are some of the most evident examples of the extent to which *Go Down, Moses* and its chronicle of the earth are related to the cultural discourse around American im/mobilities. The seven stories that form this complex text depict the earth's changes, the effects induced by time and human movement on the fields and the woods, critically underlining the contrast between an "immobile" wilderness and a "mobile" plantation. Everywhere in his narrative, Faulkner suggests that the human longing for possession and power is the reason behind the exploitation of both land and slaves. And the people who inhabit this land, both Black workers and white landowners, complicate the discussion about social im/mobility with their actions. With the exception of Ike McCaslin, who is ultimately blamed precisely for his "immobility," i.e., his inability to take action and alter the status quo, the characters in *Go Down, Moses* are frequently depicted in motion—they will at least try to change their situation, to overturn the logic of exploitation and submission, and hope for a different future. To support his discourse on these different forms of im/mobility, Faulkner relied on the short story composite and its hybrid and fragmented structure. Due to his non-chronological chronicle, his collective protagonist, and his focus on the cultural significance of modern mobilities, Faulkner sought to highlight the contradictions of his time, along with the power literature has to break down the ever-contemporary narratives of consumption, exploitation, and inequality.

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Notes

1 William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 5.

2 Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, 296.

3 Julia Leyda, *American Mobilities: Geographies of Class, Race, and Gender in US Culture* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016), 23.

4 See Joanne V. Creighton, "Revision and Craftsmanship in the Hunting Trilogy of *Go Down, Moses*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, vol. 3 (1973): 577–92; Susan G. Mann, *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 121–40.

5 He did so, for example, in a lecture given at the University of Virginia on February 15, 1957. William Faulkner, lecture in Frederick Gwynn's literature class, http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/display/wfaudio01_1#wfaudio01_1.24, accessed on April 28, 2019. The audio recordings and transcriptions of these lessons, recorded between 1957 and 1958, are collected

on the *Faulkner at Virginia: An Audio Archive* website: http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/.

6 Linda Wagner-Martin, "Introduction," in *New Essays on* Go Down, Moses, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

7 Malcolm Cowley, "Go Down to Faulkner's Land," *The New Republic* (June 29, 1942): 900; Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 124; Ronald Schleifer, "Faulkner's Storied Novel: *Go Down, Moses* and the Translation of Time," *Modern Fiction Studies* 28, no. 1 (1982): 110.

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Mobility, Car Culture, and the Environment in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

Tatiana Konrad

Abstract

Set during the Great Depression, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) focuses on an American family who are forced to leave their home in Oklahoma and travel to California in search for a better life. Apart from its authentic representations of the economic instability in the U.S. in the 1930s, industrial transformations that took place throughout the country, as well as the severe draught, the novel also comments on the issue of (auto)mobility that this articles analyzes from an eco-critical perspective. The major part of the novel takes place on the road, as the reader witnesses the family traveling west on Route 66. While the road turns into a symbol of freedom and, in a way, a means to pursue the American Dream, the truck that the family travels by makes one ponder the meaning of U.S. mobility and the nation's fascination with, and dependence on, cars. Through its focus on the highway and car, *The Grapes of Wrath* also touches upon the issue of environment. Providing meticulous descriptions of the vehicle, commenting on its enormous size and the large amount of smoke that it exhausts, the novel introduces automobility as menacing to ecology and the environment.

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Mobility, Car Culture, and the Environment in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

Tatiana Konrad

Mobility occupies an important place in American culture. One of the earlier examples that outlines mobility as not just a part of the American lifestyle but a means of sheer survival is John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Set during the Great Depression, the novel focuses on an American family which is forced to leave their home in Oklahoma and travel to California in search of a better life. Apart from its authentic representations of economic instability in the 1930s United States, the industrial transformations that took place throughout the country, and the severe drought-induced "Dust Bowl"—all primary reasons for the poverty of thousands of families—the novel also comments profoundly on (auto) mobility. It is this issue that I will analyze from an ecocritical perspective in this article.

Mobility, i.e., "the ability to move and movement itself," plays a crucial role in people's lives.[1] In his influential book *Mobilities* (2007), John Urry observes: "It sometimes seems as if all the world is on the move."[2] The world as we know it has been created because individuals and nations were mobile, travelling to different places in their home countries and the world. People have chosen to go to new territories or have been forced to leave their homelands; some travel for a short period of time, others never return to the places they thought they belonged. Together with people, animals, insects, microbes, and viruses are forever on the move; products and packages are constantly shipped to various parts of the globe. Our planet is a large space where mobility is one of its key defining components. As Tim Cresswell notes, "Mobility is everywhere": our culture is "more about routes than roots," mobility being one of the key frameworks that inform the issues of "the body and society," "the city," "the social," "nomadism," and many others. Mobility defines and is defined by "progress, …

freedom, … opportunity, and … modernity" as opposed to "shiftlessness, … deviance, and … resistance."[3]

This perpetual mobility has resulted in a variety of positive outcomes. Yet it has also caused problems that have led to various types of destruction. For example, in her book *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (2018), Mimi Sheller argues that "the historical development (and present effects) of interlocking systems of uneven mobility distort human relations with each other and with the world"; based on that, the scholar calls for "mobility justice."[4] Certainly today, in the era of climate change, mobility studies scholars revisit the phenomenon of mobility while paying particularly close attention to the relationship between the environment and movement. Transportation enabled by fossil fuels facilitates mobility. This kind of transportation also destroys our planet. Urry singles out a number of significant anti-environmental effects of mobility, including "reduced air quality; increased noise, smell and visual intrusion; ozone depletion; social fragmentation; and many medical consequences of 'accidental deaths and injuries, asthma and obesity."[5] It is because of these and many other critical problems that, as Sheller notes, the major task for the global population today is to solve "a series of crises related to how we move" and find out "how to make the transition to more environmentally sustainable and socially just mobilities."[6] Or, to borrow from Nancy Cook and David Butz, we need to address the most pressing ramifications of mobilities, which the scholars identify as "climate change" and "marginalized social groups immobilized in the slow lanes of life or forced into the express line."[7]

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* explores mobility and its consequences. The core of *The Grapes of Wrath* takes place on the road, as the family travels west on Route 66. While the road becomes a symbol of freedom, the truck in which the family travels prompts one to ponder the meaning of U.S. mobility and the nation's fascination with, and dependence on, cars. Via the establishment of the interstate highway system and the concurrent infusion of support of American car culture, a car has been glorified as an absolutely necessary object in one's life through which one can achieve freedom, success, comfort, and independence. The dependence of Americans on cars and the nation's fascination with this means of transport have profoundly intensified since the middle of the twentieth century. Through its focus on the highway and the truck, *The Grapes of Wrath* touches upon the issue of the environment. Providing meticulous descriptions of transportation, commenting on the enormous size of vehicles and the high amount of exhaust they emit, as well as foregrounding their necessity for survival during the Great Depression, the novel introduces the problem of automobility, which can and should be studied in light of environmentalism. Thus, this article focuses on such concepts as the highway, car culture, and mobility as they are represented in *The Grapes of Wrath* and examines

them as crucial issues in current environmental debates. The article's main aim is to discuss the literary imagination of transportation and traveling as representing a menace to ecology and to the environment.

I reread *The Grapes of Wrath* from an eco-critical perspective, set against contemporary debates surrounding climate change. Steinbeck's novel presents an early corrective to a too celebratory perspective of mobility in general and U.S. car culture in particular. In doing so, *The Grapes of Wrath* turns into a story of a doomed journey—the journey of a single family, but also the journey of humanity writ large, for the desire to be on the move using transportation enabled by fossil fuels has, as we understand it now, essentially become a means of destroying the environment. In my analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*, mobility, or rather, automobility, becomes a prism through which to understand the role of anthropogenic factors in triggering environmental degradation, including climate change. Automobility is thus not a simple term that can be conflated with transportation or car culture; it is a complex phenomenon that denotes a way of existing and being. In my analysis of the novel, I illustrate John Urry's argument that automobility negotiates the car as a "manufactured object" along with "individual consumption," "technical and social interlinkages with other institutions, industries and related occupations," "public and private life and time *and* space," "a dominant culture," as well as the environment as such.[8]

As I will further demonstrate, *The Grapes of Wrath* profoundly challenges the issue of autonomy communicated through automobility—autonomy that stands for liberty, democracy, self-awareness, and individualism—vividly illustrating how mobility can be compelled rather than chosen. In doing so, *The Grapes of Wrath*, however, does not undermine the role of the human in causing ecological degradation, but rather it emphasizes the complex nature of the human-environment nexus. The novel hence does not simply foreground mobility as a destructive force consciously chosen by humans but rather reinforces the role of various socio-political systems, including class, in shaping the intricate meaning of automobility, with ecology and the environment being its constituent parts. Indeed, as Noel B. Salazar argues, mobility creates a "hierarchy of movements."[9] This, in my view, largely reinforces the contested nature of mobility, identifying mobility as not necessarily liberating or signifying freedom but also as an instrument to oppress multiple agents, among them nature, the environment, and migrants.

The Grapes of Wrath is not only a novel about overcoming hostile social relations and a hostile environment, but it is also a novel about being hostile to the environment. As Rick Marshall claims, "Steinbeck uses [the] dual nature of the highway landscape as an illustration of the constant tension between opportunity and oppression in

the 1930s. He maintains this tension by placing artifacts in the highway landscape for the reader to discover, stressing the concept of the highway as a product of the economic machine that feeds increasing industrialization."[10] It is the novel's focus on hostility toward humans *and* the environment that indeed makes it, as Alexa Weik von Mossner calls it, "environmental fiction."[11] The focus on both the road and the environment renders *The Grapes of Wrath* an intriguing example of where mobility—symbolized through the road—and environmental degradation intersect.

My eco-critical reading of Steinbeck's novel intends to highlight its capacity to challenge the maintenance of hegemonic meanings of the road and car culture as purely freeing. I contend that mobility involves a number of factors that challenge the dominant understanding of mobility as a positive phenomenon, its influence on the environment being one of the major ones. Combining an eco-critical perspective with mobility studies in my analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath*, I argue that the two inform each other in profound ways, broadening existing meanings of both the environment and mobility. The intricate connection between the two helps one understand the ecological and cultural crises that humanity finds itself in today and paints an alternative picture of the history of mobility and environmental degradation. This reading of the novel foregrounds a crucial question: Is humanity, like the Joads, currently on the road to nowhere?

Road Narratives and Ecology

Re-reading travel literature through an eco-critical lens is an essential task for scholars today. Including the images of transportation enabled by fossil fuels in their portrayals of mobility, these narratives contribute to (literary) environmental history. They outline not only the development of the very phenomenon of mobility with the creation of such modes of transportation but also the transformation of our culture that has become largely defined by speed, comfort, production, and consumption. Literature that discusses mobility through this kind of transportation tells us the story of progress that resulted in a rapid destruction of the planet and climate change.

Ronald Primeau writes, "Travel narratives are found in the earliest American literature across regions, in many genres, using several modes of transport. From pioneer diaries to science fiction, movement has been a central subject and theme of a national literature of exploration and self-discovery."[12] Traveling has been central to the American experience; indeed, maritime explorations of the New World led to the settling of America by Europeans, and the United States, upon its foundation as a country, pushed the exploration, settlement, and development of the North American continent further westward throughout the nineteenth century. Mobility was,

and remains, the way to "discover" a country or, more generally, any geographic space as well as one's own place in it. Transportation and the road are traditionally understood to be the two concepts most central to mobility. The road, for example, has been the subject of a number of interpretations that regard it as the key aspect of American democracy. Ann Brigham specifies, "For writers, directors, protagonists, scholars, and audiences, the road endures as a realm of possibility and promise. This association begins with its spatial character. As a space and a symbol, the road represents expansiveness and open-endedness. It may lead out of somewhere specific, but it could go anywhere. In the vast United States, and in our vaster imaginations, the road twists and turns, offering new directions, exciting detours, unprecedented access, and a beckoning horizon."[13] From the idea that "the road holds out the promise and possibility of the unknown—or unrealized" to the "expect[ation] [of] something better down the road," the road is a sign of change—not only in "orientation" but in *being* as such.[14] The freedom to choose where to travel and by which means, to exchange one lifestyle for another, to make plans and then realize them in a new place, or to leave for parts unknown and to allow the life you find there to decide your fate: this idea is central to a prominent understanding of human rights and democracy. Literature, and specifically "road stories," writes Katie Mills, portray "freedom of movement" as the primary aspect of a broader and more fundamental issue of "liberty."[15]

Ann Brigham suggests that we take road literature to be a relatively new genre, arguing that "road narratives date back to the early twentieth century."[16] She refers here to the transportation system's twentieth-century transformation, a time that first saw the building of paved roads that were particularly necessary for bicycles and the subsequent establishment of a vast automotive highway system. Literature responded to these innovations, and thus the genre of road literature was born. This genre's narratives all have a rather peculiar setting: "While most literary road trips move through several geographical regions, often portraying a cross-country trek, the highways through the heartland are in many books either the major setting of the story or the significant space through which travelers must pass on their way toward their destination."[17]

Most road narratives include means of transportation as the key agent. Transportation is not just some sporadic element in a story, but rather a chief signifier of the nomadic nature of the American nation. Making movement through space faster and more convenient, transportation (excuse the tautology) transports one to a desired place—a place that will presumably guarantee some benefit, whether it be financial stability, physical and moral safety, aesthetic pleasure, inner calm, or other comforts that an individual desires or seeks.

Portraying a road trip as "an iconic American experience,"[18] road literature can create an idyllic image of travel. Even if the characters experience certain misfortunes on the road, or have problems with their means of transport, mobility in such examples of literary works is positive. A given trip's positive outcome might never happen, or maybe one's plans are not realized, but even in the most tragic stories, a certain positive valence of mobility as an experience provides a silver lining.

It is rather unprecedented, however, that while the road and transportation have each been singled out as key elements in road literature, another significant presence—the environment—has been neglected. Certainly today, when climate change has finally become an issue that many scientists, scholars, and activists have started to worry about in earnest, it is essential to incorporate the idea of ecological degradation into transport narrative analyses, not only to underscore the ubiquity of environmentalism in the human experience but also to reimagine the genre of travel narratives and the concept of mobility as such, which have enabled (among other factors) climate change to take place.

Transportation by air, land, and water enabled by fossil fuels accounts for around "15% of global greenhouse emissions" and is thus a significant factor to consider when searching for ways to minimize the ramifications of climate change.[19] And although "the environmental effects of transport have long been recognized, … until the 1970s only a few policies or actions were enacted to address these effects. Moreover, the actions enacted were for the most part of very limited scope. Hence, with only few exceptions (such as the 1963 Buchanan Report) it cannot be said that they amounted to an overall policy or strategy to address the environmental effects of transport."[20] Indeed, along with the problem of transportation, "anthropogenic climate change involves various types of mobility and processes of deterritorialization."[21] The reimagination of mobility, including its literary representations, as a trigger of, and contributor to, environmental degradation is crucial to the collective understanding of transportation, the road, and the freedom of movement with regard to both the United States and the world.

The twentieth century has irrevocably transformed our vision of civilization and of comfortable living. The extensive use of fossil fuels has enabled humanity to create a new model of existence oriented toward nations and individuals reaping profits and benefits from nearly any activity. In the introduction to their anthology *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture* (2017), Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman, and Adam Carlson argue, "Oil and its outcomes—speed, plastics, and the luxuries of capitalism, to name a few—have lubricated our relationship to one another and the environment for the duration of the twentieth century."[22] These scholars underscore the intricate relationship between humans, on the one hand, and natural energy resources, on the other; a

web of connections has become so pervasive and tenacious that it seems impossible for us to sever it. The dependence on fossil-fuel energy is particularly difficult to eliminate because of the deeply rooted democratic notion of car usage as an integral part of what has long been understood as "living the 'American' way." In the 1950s, "when Congress funded construction of the interstate highway system, nearly all of the basic patterns underpinning the creation of car-centered landscapes—as well as nearly all of the most significant environmental problems related to heavy car use—were firmly in place. With these changes, the United States became Car Country."[23] Today, the U.S. remains perhaps the most scarily vivid example of a country where the nation is literally bound to their private forms of transportation for various purposes: commuting to work and school, driving to places of leisure and shopping, even getting to parks so one can then go for a walk. The relationship between the human and the car has become so intricately intertwined that the car is now an extension of the human body, enabling mobility but also ensuring that without the involvement of an automobile it is not simply restricted but practically impossible.

The car's vital role in the lives of American individuals has prompted various lofty interpretations. For David Louter, the car is "the very symbol of technology destroying an older way of life, [which] offered mobility and freedom."[24] Stephanie LeMenager, in turn, claims: "For Americans, the car and the road enable the sense of radical materiality—feeling embodied—that has been theorized as ecological affect." She adds, "Cars made the human body more valuable, pleasurable, and fun. They also caused, and still cause, more human deaths per day than any single agent, forcing questions about human consumption, the price of the mediated self made possible by cheap energy."[25] The great tragedy is the extent of Americans' transportation dependence. The enormous role fossil fuel transportation and mobility have assumed in the American cultural imagination have become so great that they are hallmarks of the "American" way of life. Transportation, though linked to considerable progress, has given rise to numerous other problems, both for humans (among them widespread obesity and a high number of deaths in accidents) and for the environment, most profoundly apparent in the ecological decline that is currently manifesting itself on multiple levels.

Mobility and the Environment in *The Grapes of Wrath*

The heated debates regarding climate change force one to consider not only the current ecological situation but also to examine the historical development leading up to it. Transportation enabled by fossil fuels has been destructive for the environment since its inception. Literature, among other media, offers powerful descriptions of transportation, its role with regard to the American nation, as well as its influence on the environment. One such narrative is *The Grapes of Wrath*, which mostly unfolds on

the road, inside a truck.[26] In what follows, I explore mobility and environmental degradation, as portrayed in the novel, through the prism of power relations, where class and gender play a prominent role. I first focus on the novel's depictions of agricultural transport. I demonstrate how these portrayals reinforce the issue of monstrosity so prominently voiced in *The Grapes of Wrath* through the images of class oppression and humanity's (ab)use of nature. I then move to the dual meaning of transportation in the novel as both a means through which mobility is enabled and a home. Finally, I revisit the concept of monstrosity that informs mobility in *The Grapes of Wrath*, illustrating how mobility turns from an opportunity to find a better life to a doomed and deadly experience.

Given the age and reputation of the novel, it has become the subject of numerous scholarly debates, and has been particularly helpful for the construction of the cultural image of the Great Depression. Yet, in light of today's problems related to mobility, I revisit *The Grapes of Wrath* in order to make it meaningful within contemporary discourses and demonstrate that current events related to ecology and the environment open up a new, ecocritical perspective on the novel.

The Grapes of Wrath falls into the category of road narratives for which "the meaning of the road-story genre takes shape through an understanding of the importance of who takes to the road."[27] The focus on a poor family of tenant farmers, who have been caught up in a succession of radical social, economic, and environmental transformations, which include bank foreclosure, agricultural changes, drought, and severe dust storms—the phenomenon that has become known as the Dust Bowl—is crucial to the analysis of the plot. That the novel is "most essentially a road book" can hardly be questioned.[28]

According to *The Grapes of Wrath*, two themes best describe the 1930s: "industrialization and migration."[29] Crucially, in the novel, one is the cause of the other: mechanization and the industrialization of agriculture cause forced mobility, which, in turn, causes pollution and more ecological degradation. It is also through the process of mechanization that (auto)mobility, transportation, cars, tractors, trucks, and machines are introduced as *eco-objects*, among their other roles, i.e., their destructive connection to the environment is foregrounded. Louis Owens pinpoints the unequal relationship among migrants, nature, and machines: "While the migrants are identified closely with the natural world, the mechanistic world stands in antithesis to the biological migrants. *The Grapes of Wrath* indeed abounds with examples of destructive machines, beginning with the light truck that swerves in order to hit the land turtle making its way across the highway. Later, not only will a car hit and kill the Joads' dog, but we will hear a story of a 'Big Cad,' which hit a truckful of migrants,

killing one of the migrant children and throwing 'bed clothes an' chickens an' kids' all around."[30]

Some of the most vivid descriptions of mechanization and its evils are introduced through the images of the tractors that invade the tenants' land. The tractor is first described as the weapon of the "monster"—the novel's powerful metaphor for "the Bank or the Company"—for "One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families."[31] Yet soon the tractor itself becomes a "monster":

> The tractors came over the roads and into the fields, great crawlers moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects. They crawled over the ground, laying the track and rolling on it and picking it up. Diesel tractors, puttering while they stood idle; they thundered when they moved, and then settled down to a droning roar. Snub-nosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through door-yards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. They did not run on the ground, but on their own roadbeds. They ignored hills and gulches, water courses, fences, houses.[32]

Curiously, the comparison of the tractor to an insect helps reinforce mechanization of nature/the environment: the tractor invades the ecological space as a new, human-made species. The mechanical nature of a tractor is described further through "its machined surfaces, its surge of power, the roar of its detonating cylinders." The novel goes on to characterize its destructive relation to the earth as a perverse sexual act, a violent rape that humiliates, enslaves, and destroys: "Behind the tractor rolled the shining disks, cutting the earth with blades—not plowing but surgery, pushing the cut earth to the right where the second row of disks cut it and pushed it to the left; slicing blades shining, polished by the cut earth. And pulled behind the disks, the harrows combining with iron teeth so that the little clods broke up and the earth lay smooth. Behind the harrows, the long—twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion." The driver of such a machine is no longer a human being: "it did not look like a man . . . he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat."[33] A sense of the tractor's monstrosity is created through the descriptions of its strong and dangerous carcass, the fuel that it requires, and its relatively large size. The tractor, whose components are thoroughly described in the novel, replaces humans in the field, in terms of body parts. The novel also effectively contrasts the vulnerability of the human body and the metal body of the tractor. Owens makes an important observation: "It is not the machine, however, that is evil but the uses to which it is put."[34] According to the novel, those in power use the machines to dominate over those it has subjugated, nature included.

Sigridur Gudmarsdottir even introduces the term "ecorape" to describe the influence of certain events on nature: "*The Grapes of Wrath* discloses an ecorape that

takes place through sociological, economical and ecological disaster, known as 'The Dust Bowl.'"[35] The themes of motherhood manifested through both the main matriarch Ma Joad and her pregnant daughter Rose of Sharon can be juxtaposed to the economic and agricultural transformations depicted in the novel to understand the sufferings experienced by life-giving nature and a life-giving woman. This juxtaposition turns the novel not only into a work of environmental fiction due to its focus on transportation and transportation's destructive role on the environment, but also, more specifically, into an eco-feminist narrative that highlights the masculinist-predatory representations of the machines. To borrow from Gudmarsdottir, "Steinbeck draws similarities of cuts, rapes and violence between male domination over earthly production and female reproduction."[36]

While the images of the bank and the tractor are so prominent in the novel, portrayed quite literally as monsters, they are, of course, merely parts of the larger monster: runaway capitalism. *The Grapes of Wrath* reconstructs a transformative moment in the history of the United States through the personal stories of the tenants, unveiling not only the ways in which capitalism has dramatically changed the economy of the U.S. but also how it has impacted class relations within the nation. The working class, represented by the Joads (and numerous other families) in the novel, cannot withstand the power of capitalism—the system that prioritizes production, consumption, and the profit that one can gain through these two processes. Unable to produce so much as is now required, the working class is sacrificed, and technology comes to replace humans. The bank and the tractor in *The Grapes of Wrath* are thus the instruments of capitalism.

Along with the tractor, illustrated as the machine of people who belong to a certain class, a superior group, the novel ponders the usage of other machines—those created for the purpose of transporting people, in this case, independent of their social class. The Joads believe that the only way they can survive is by heading west to California, obviously unaware at first that thousands of other migrants from Oklahoma have also decided to do this, and unable to anticipate that their dream of a decent life in California will become a nightmare as they will have to fight for jobs, money, and their very existence and future.

Stuart W. Leslie argues, "That Steinbeck chose the road as its setting reveals his shrewd appreciation for geographical and social mobility as a defining American trait."[37] Yet it seems problematic to me to characterize the forced mobility described in *The Grapes of Wrath* as "a defining American trait," for had it not been for the Great Depression, the family would not have moved, given the strong bond between the land and its human inhabitants, as described in the novel. The novel foregrounds the barbarism of depriving people of their land and forcing their relocation: "Sure, cried

the tenant men, but it's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours—being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it."[38] Thus not only does *The Grapes of Wrath* question the concept of ownership that was clearly abused in the 1930s, but it also takes a negative stance on mobility and migration, seeing these phenomena to be the result of class inequality and a forced necessity imposed on those whom the system leaves powerless. That the country, as the Joads contemplate on their way to California, still has something to offer them acknowledges its geographic vastness as well as the potential that mobility may ultimately provide what one desires. Yet "with every mile the Joads drive the Highway 66, with every new cut and rape inflicted on the land, and with every new page of the novel anger and injustice are slowly accumulating."[39]

The truck in which the Joads' journey serves several purposes in the novel. It is, of course, a means of transport that speeds up the trip in addition to its added comfort; it is also their temporary home, as it manages to accommodate not only the whole family but also all their possessions; finally, it is an agent that helps one look at mobility through the prism of environmentalism.[40]

Unlike the tractor, the truck seems to gain a positive connotation for the Joads. Though they are forced to load it and use it to move away, the truck symbolizes a favorable change for them. Being sure that they can start a new, good life in California, the Joads use the truck as a means of reaching their goal—both literally and metaphorically. However, except for this single nuance, *The Grapes of Wrath* does not seem to differentiate between trucks and tractors. In the novel, both are machines—the monsters of the new system that are used to enslave or destroy both the poor and nature itself.

As the novel begins, Tom, the second Joad son, is on the way home after his release on parole from prison. Given his situation, he must hitchhike. Eventually he boards a truck, whose detailed description opens the novel's second chapter: "A huge red transport truck stood in front of the little roadside restaurant. The vertical exhaust pipe muttered softly, and an almost invisible haze of steel-blue smoke hovered over its end. It was a new truck, shining red, and in twelve-inch letters on its sides—OKLAHOMA CITY TRANSPORT COMPANY. Its double tires were new, and a brass padlock stood straight out from the hasp on the big back doors."[41] The novel's attention to detail is crucial here. While the truck as such is important to the novel, for it enables mobility, *The Grapes of Wrath* leaves this use as a self-evident fact. Instead, it comments on the monstrosity of transportation, which is manifested through its deadly influence on nature. While describing tractors, the narrator finds it important to specify that they are "diesel" ones; during the aforementioned inventory of the

truck, the narrator mentions "the vertical exhaust pipe" and "steel-blue smoke."[42] The machines' massiveness seems only to amplify their negative effects on the environment. The suggested gentleness and beauty of the truck (as understood through the way the pipe works, the description of the smoke, and the condition and color of the truck) helps intensify the unwillingness of car users to see the truck's negative impact on the environment.

As the truck moves, attention is drawn to the mechanisms that bring the monster to life: "The hitch-hiker flopped down out of sight and clung to the door handle. The motor roared up for a moment, the gears clicked in, and the great truck moved away, first gear, second gear, third gear, and then a high whining pick-up and fourth gear. Under the clinging man the highway blurred dizzily by. It was a mile to the first turn in the road, then the truck slowed down. The hitch-hiker stood up, eased the door open, and slipped into the seat." Later: "Then the motor roared up and the gears clicked and the great red truck rolled heavily away." And finally, "When Joad heard the truck get under way, gear climbing up to gear and the ground throbbing under the rubber beating of the tires, he stopped and turned about and watched it until it disappeared. When it was out of sight he still watched the distance and the blue air-shimmer."[43] Paying close attention to the way the truck is constructed and meticulously describing how the truck can be activated, the novel emphasizes the omnipresence of technology and mechanization in human lives and how they change the nature of *being*, both illustrating what mechanical being is and suggesting that it largely improves a human's being. One the other hand, through these descriptions, *The Grapes of Wrath* brings to the fore the issue of mobility and the practice of moving as such, largely upgraded through transportation. As it does so, the novel, however, also constructs the image of the new world—the world dominated by transportation that, in turn, largely transforms the environment.[44]

As a kind of transportation enabled by fossil fuels, the truck, just like the tractor, destroys nature. Yet the novel seems to differentiate between the two vehicles, such that whereas the tractor becomes the weapon of the system, the truck is used by an individual. In the novel, tractors drive through fields, while trucks use highways. The highway, in a sense, becomes a continuation of the truck and, interestingly, of its destructive influence on nature. Thus, chapter 3 opens with a description of the human-made highway, and of nature that must adjust to the transformed ecosystem:

> The concrete highway was edged with a mat of tangled, broken, dry grass, and the grass heads were heavy with oat beards to catch on a dog's coat, and foxtails to tangle in a horse's fetlocks, and clover burrs to fasten in sheep's wool; sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed with an appliance of dispersal, twisting darts and parachutes for the wind, little spears and

> balls of tiny thorns, and all waiting for animals and for the wind, for a man's trouser cuff or the hem of a woman's skirt, all passive but armed with appliances of activity, still, but each possessed of the anlage of movement.[45]

The Grapes of Wrath discusses the coexistence of humanity and the natural world; yet this coexistence is, in principle, an inevitability, a situation that has been imposed on nature—it can be raped, enslaved, and destroyed via the exercise of human will. At the same time as being harmful and unamiable, these complex connections and relations between the human (including various objects created by humanity, such as the highway and transport) and nature are also depicted as codependent and symbiotic. The idea of becoming part of, dominating, exploiting, degrading, and shaping or destroying complicates the clear-cut difference between humanity and nature in general, and mobility and the environment in particular, suggesting that one is part of the other. The precarious existence that humanity condemns nature to is the result of the transformation enabled by industrialization and mobility. Commenting on the latter, the passage intensifies the idea of being "on the move" even through the descriptions of nature that awaits its own "transport" to move someplace else, grow, and propagate in an unknown territory, far away from its origin. Likewise, the novel emphasizes the radical changes that the highway enforces on the migrants: "They settled into a new technique of living; the highway became their home and movement their medium of expression. Little by little they settled into the new life."[46] Here, the destructive force of mobility is foregrounded only to intensify the idea of derangement triggered by industrialization and mechanization and manifested through, among others, the transformation of the environment. When analyzed retrospectively and symptomatically from today's experience and knowledge of the climate crisis, the novel's references to trucks, tractors, and the highway, and the deadly nature of the transformations that all three bring can only be reinforced, considering how drastically human interventions have changed the environment and eco-systems through various agricultural practices, air pollution, and deforestation, to name but a few.

The growing transportation addiction is intensified later, in chapter 7, devoted to descriptions of cars for sale and of people who are buying them in order to move west. The chapter opens as follows: "In the towns, on the edges of the towns, in fields, in vacant lots, the used-car yards, the wreckers' yards, the garages with blazoned signs—Used Cars, Good Used Cars. Cheap transportation, three trailers. '27 Ford, clean. Checked cars, guaranteed cars. Free radio. Car with 100 gallons of gas free. Come in and look. Used Cars. No overhead." This description gives the reader an idea of the intensity and speed with which cars are being introduced into human lives. Consider, for example, the indignation of one of the sellers, who was offered mules to cover the expensive price of one of the cars: "*Mules!* Hey, Joe, hear this? This guy wants to trade

mules. Didn't nobody tell you this is the machine age? They don't use mules for nothing but glue no more." Yet such a description also anticipates the expected scale of mobility, borne out in the wave of labor migrants who will drive through much of the country only to find poverty and disappointment at their journeys' end, though now they are absolutely sure about one thing: "I got to get a car. We're goin' to California. I got to get a car." The chapter concludes with a view of a pool of cars as vast as the ocean: "Square noses, round noses, rusty noses, shovel noses, and the long curves of streamlines, and the flat surfaces before streamlining. Bargains today. Old monsters with deep upholstery—you can cut her into a truck easy. Two-wheel trailers, axles rusty in the hard afternoon sun. Used Cars. Good Used Cars. Clean, runs good. Don't pump oil. . . . Cadillacs, La Salles, Buicks, Plymouths, Packards, Chevvies, Fords, Pontiacs. Row on row, headlights glinting in the afternoon sun. Good Used Cars."[47] These cars are mechanical monsters that humans buy, spending the last of their money in hopes of a better future.

What the Joads eventually realize, however, is far from those rather idyllic images that they pictured when leaving for California. They soon understand that there are too many migrants, and getting a job with decent pay will be impossible. Yet through the Joads' story *The Grapes of Wrath* also invites the reader to reconsider mobility during the Great Depression and ponder its deadliness. First, on the way to California, both Grandpa and Grandma die. Through the death of these two family members, the novel arguably promotes some sort of holistic eco-ethics, in which every intervention (whether it is humanity mechanizing nature, one group of people dominating the other and forcing them to move, or otherwise) means a degradation. Grandpa is ultimately buried somewhere in the fields—the tragedy here is not only his death but the realization that members of his family will hardly ever be able to visit his modest grave. The grandmother dies on the road, close to the California state border, and stopping to bury her right away is not an option: "'The fambly hadda get acrost,' Ma said miserably."[48] Along with that, the novel reveals mobility to be a false hope. The overcrowded roads, the places where trucks have driven people to, literally causing overpopulation, prove that the journey taken was a failure: "Three hundred thousand in California and more coming. And in California the roads full of frantic people running like ants to pull, to push, to lift, to work. For every manload to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it; for every stomachful of food available, five mouths open."[48] And further: "On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food. And the anger began to ferment."[49] Mobility thus performs the role of a monster: just as the tractor sliced the soil, so did this forced mobility exhaust, exasperate, and drive to despair some of the migrants, and others were murdered. In this way, the novel draws parallels between the migrants from Oklahoma and their land—both fall victim to industrialization and mechanization. Yet, as the examples have illustrated,

the destructive power of transportation on ecology and human existence is one of the key issues raised in *The Grapes of Wrath*, for through the metaphor of the monster the novel vividly describes the exhaust produced by trucks and tractors, the land taken away from the farmers, and the migrants themselves, who have covered such a long distance only to find out that their destination has nothing to offer them.

Conclusion

Revisiting Steinbeck's novel—a book filled with images of mobility, transportation, and degraded nature—during our current era of global climate change opens up new perspectives on the cultural interpretation of ecological decline, the environment, and global warming. The focus on the family of poor farmers during the Great Depression sets the text's tone, outlining migration and mobility to be the only way out. Yet the skill with which *The Grapes of Wrath* gradually intensifies the trip as a doomed journey helps one to reimagine mobility as not necessarily a part of the American spirit but as an inevitability that is compelled rather than chosen.

The Grapes of Wrath includes numerous descriptions to demonize transportation. Yet the novel does not seem to be against progress as such; rather, it opposes the ramifications that such progress exerts on a specific group of people and on nature itself. *The Grapes of Wrath* is an epic human drama. While it has already been interpreted from social, economic, and gender perspectives, it is necessary to reconsider it as a text addressing ecological decline. The novel is filled with themes and events that are typical of climate change novels: starvation, migration, and overpopulation, even the flooding that destroys the Joads' dwelling toward the end of the book. Moreover, the novel's insistent focus on transportation simply cannot be ignored, particularly today, when the effects of various means of transport on our planet are well known. The novel's ending is crucial in this respect. As thousands of families drive to the place that they think will bring them peace and stability, ignoring the deadly smoke that rises above the crowded highways, they end up with nothing. This scenario can be aptly applied to the current situation, as humanity's dependence on cars has created the phenomenon of car culture, filling to excess roads throughout the world, whereas our myopic understanding of climate change has allowed us to close our eyes to the smoke that billions of cars emit into the atmosphere. From an environmental perspective, it seems that humanity is, indeed, like the Joads, on the road to nowhere.

Notes

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40 While this truck functions as the family's home, the novel makes explicit that it is a forced, hostile meaning of the vehicle. The abandoned boxcar where the family stays later, by contrast, is perceived as a comforting space that gives shelter to the family. Mobility and immobility are skillfully contrasted here to intensify the idea of automobility as the chief characteristic of the new age (de-mechanized and deranged means of transport are not needed and are thus thrown away) and mobility as a means of oppression and subjugation.

41 Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*, 7.

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44 For more on the environmental impact of transportation, see Tatiana Prorokova-Konrad, ed., *Transportation and the Culture of Climate Change: Accelerating Ride to Global Crisis* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020).

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49 Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*, 280, 334.

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Tatiana Konrad is the author of *Docu-Fictions of War: U.S. Interventionism in Film and Literature* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019) and (co-)editor of *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma, and Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2018), *Transportation and the Culture of Climate Change: Accelerating Ride to Global Crisis* (West Virginia University Press, 2020), and *Cold War II: Hollywood's Renewed Obsession with Russia* (University Press of Mississippi, 2020). Currently anchored at the University of Vienna, she was recently awarded an Austrian Science Fund grant for her project "Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-) COVID-19 World," which will launch in February 2022.

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Regular Articles

The "Games" People Play

The Dangers of Holocaust Simulations and Thought Experiments in Nathan Englander's and Ellen Umansky's Short Stories

Sabrina Völz

Abstract

According to a 2018 survey conducted by The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, "over one-fifth of Millennials (22%) haven't heard or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust." Since the publication of that study, calls for Holocaust-mandated education have been intensifying. Some academics and teachers have advocated the use of simulations to create empathy for Holocaust victims and survivors. However, sensitive subjects such as the Holocaust must be taught with great care, keeping sound, age-appropriate pedagogical goals in mind. Otherwise, it may do more harm than good. This article discusses two early twenty-first-century Holocaust-themed short stories which serve as stern warnings about the potential dangers and lasting effects of irresponsible Holocaust pedagogy. In Ellen Umansky's "How to Make it to the Promised Land" (2003) and Nathan Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" (2013), characters engage in "what if" scenarios by playing seemingly harmless Holocaust "games" that take a dark turn and conclude with unsettling revelations. While the stories are works of fiction, the analog "games" described in both narratives are loose adaptations of actual games hat Umansky and Englander played as teens.

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The "Games" People Play

The Dangers of Holocaust Simulations and Thought Experiments in Nathan Englander's and Ellen Umansky's Short Stories

Sabrina Völz

Several decades after World War II, the dedication to, and examination of, Holocaust education extends far beyond North America and Europe. In 2000, forty-six governments signed the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum, an important document that declares support for Holocaust education and an annual Holocaust Memorial Day. Recent surveys published on Holocaust awareness in the U.S. have only supported the urgency of that call. According to a 2018 study conducted in the United States by The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, "over one-fifth of Millennials (22%) haven't heard or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust."[1] And a 2020 Pew Research Center study found that "fewer than half [of adults] can correctly answer multiple-choice questions about the number of Jews who were murdered or the way Adolf Hitler came to power."[2]

As an increasing number of Holocaust survivors pass away, the fear of forgetting coupled with concerns about Jewish secularism have led rabbis, educators, scholars, and writers to discuss how the lessons of the Holocaust as well as the memory of its victims and survivors might best be preserved and most effectively conveyed to new generations. This study examines these concerns as well as the discussion on Jewish American identity and Holocaust simulation pedagogy as they pertain to Ellen Umansky's "How to Make it to the Promised Land" (2003) and Nathan Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" (2013). In both short stories, which reference Anne Frank, characters engage in "what if" scenarios by playing seemingly harmless Holocaust "games" that take a dark turn and conclude with unsettling revelations. In Umansky's story, the insecure teenage narrator, Lizzie, is forced to participate in an ill-conceived Holocaust activity at a Jewish summer camp. Instead of helping her to understand her Jewish identity

and history, the role-play leads the narrator to betray a friend to save her own life in that simulated environment. Englander's short story gives readers a glimpse into Holocaust consciousness in the United States today and treats the lasting impact of overzealous Holocaust education on Jewish identity. In Englander's story, yeshiva school attendance has influenced Debbie, one of the four main characters, to believe that another Holocaust is likely to happen. She regularly takes part in the "Anne Frank Game," which is a thought experiment centering on the question of whose Gentile neighbors and friends would hide Jews in the event of another Holocaust. When played with her husband and an Orthodox Jewish couple, the seemingly innocent "game" exposes one character's complicity, a revelation that silences all participants.

The literature on Holocaust education overwhelmingly sides with those who condemn or reject Holocaust simulations and role-plays over those few who maintain their relevance and usefulness.[3] In general, history simulations and role-playing games seek to capture student interest, train critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and develop empathy for victims. For example, Jaqueline Glasgow's role-play for young adults aims to assist students in "understand[ing] the gravity of the decisions Jewish family members made when they heard the Nazi deportation plan."[4] The "game" is one suggested expansion activity to Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (1989), a book for young readers aged 9 to 10 based on the Danish rescue of Jews.

Glasgow's 2006 Holocaust role-play overlooks fundamental didactic principles. The directions to the role-play lacking all contextualization are sparse: participants learn of the resistance's warning to flee the imminent deportation of Jews. Students must then decide what to do. In groups of five, they each adopt one of the following roles: "Father (decision maker), Mother (caregiver), Son (age 16, somewhat independent), Daughter (age 8, remains silent), Daughter (11-month-old whose crying may give them away)."[5] In any context, "playing" gender stereotypes is harmful and only serves to perpetuate them: "Discriminatory social norms and stereotypes reinforce gendered identities and determine power relations that constrain women's and men's behaviour in ways that lead to inequality."[6] Since the role-play was created by "four students … in a teaching methods class," it could have been used as a learning tool to unmask bias and deconstruct stereotypes.[7] Instead, it appears in a "best practice" article without critical commentary.

Next, the activity trivializes Jewish experience. The first choice the father must make is formulated in only three words: run, hide, or stay. The students must then blindly choose one alternative with a pre-determined outcome without any further information, such as the place they might try to hide or the city they might try to escape to. Depending on their first choice, students make two to three additional decisions with a total of six possible outcomes. In reality, Jews had to take dozens of

factors into consideration and may have had to make hundreds of small decisions. Another major problem with this type of activity is that it may appear to some students to place the responsibility of the family's fate on the father (or the Jews themselves) instead of on the Nazis and their murderous machinery. Finally, what-if scenarios are artificial; it is impossible to know what decisions people would actually make until they are truly confronted with them.

In the end, it is unclear what Glasgow's students purportedly learned from, or how they felt about, the experience because neither actual results nor suggested answers to the debriefing are provided. As far as I can tell, the failure to include students' reactions and takeaways seems to be characteristic of much of the "best practice" literature on Holocaust role-plays as well as some teacher-created materials about the Holocaust for purchase by global, for-profit education organizations, a topic addressed in the last section of this essay. By contrast, Umansky's and Englander's focus on the role-play participants' perspectives, takeaways, and the trauma destructive Holocaust education causes them. These stories may be used as a means for sensitizing readers to the limitations of extreme forms of emotionally-based pedagogy.

Ellen Umansky's "How to Make it to the Promised Land" was inspired by a game that she played at summer camp. It involved Russian draft evaders trying to escape to the U.S. or Israel in the 1980s. In a note on her narrative, Umansky explains that fiction allows her to explore how an outsider at Jewish camp "would make sense of the Holocaust, how such horrors would, or wouldn't be assimilated into their lives."[8] Although her satirical short story has not previously garnered much scholarly interest, it has appeared in several anthologies and did attract the attention of Film Director Sam Zalutsky. His adaptation of Umansky's short story into a high-quality short film appeared in 2014. In "How to Make it to the Promised Land," there are eleven underlying mistakes that the camp leadership makes when constructing a Holocaust role-play for summer campers.

"How to Make it to the Promised Land" begins in medias res and is narrated by fifteen-year-old Lizzie Lenthem, who attends "Camp Shalom" in California in 1999. The Israeli-American narrator has grudgingly agreed to spend her summer at "Jew-camp hell."[9] In contrast to the other campers, who have been attending the camp for years, Lizzie is a newcomer who has little to no background in Judaism, sealing her fate as an outsider.

As the story opens, instead of playing sports or doing arts and crafts, the campers are informed about a role-playing game (RPG) in which they are compelled to participate. Two-thirds of the teens are to be Polish Jews living in the Lodz ghetto on November 1, 1940. Their aim is to avoid deportation, while the remaining

campers assume the identities of Polish or German officials or SS guards. Enablers, indifferent bystanders, resisters, and other non-Jewish victims of persecution—including Sinti and Roma, LGBTQ persons, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and people with disabilities—find no place in the Holocaust RPG. Simplifying history by placing campers into two opposing groups marks the first didactic limitation and perpetuates thinking in terms of binaries.

The day after the "game" is announced, the campers are stripped of their own identities and handed ID cards with a picture of their character and basic information about their character's name as well as marital and family status. Based on that information, the participants anticipate value judgments and survival strategies employed by Jewish individuals in that context. The secular Jewish narrator assumes the role of twenty-one-year-old Anya Ossevsheva, mother of four children. The story alludes to the ID cards offered to visitors as they enter the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Permanent Exhibition. In that space, each visitor who accepts one of the six hundred cards intended to personalize history learns about the biographies of actual people, facts about their life before and during the Holocaust as well as their fate. Some survive, while others do not.

In Umansky's short story, Lizzie and her fellow campers receive much less information than the cards the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) provides, ensuring superficial identification at best and a trivialization of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust at worst.[10] Robert M. Prince lists different variables that affect the uniqueness of each Holocaust victim's or survivor's story: "life before persecution, specificity of experience, hiding, passing, conditions of concentration camp internment, physical suffering, losses of family, iconic experiences. . . . Other variables affecting the characteristics of survivors include conditions of life post liberation, renewed persecution, opportunities, disappointments and the same vicissitudes of fortune that determined survival."[11]

Both the simulation's claim to historical reality and the neglect of possible variables that influenced Jewish victims' chances of survival represent the RPG's second and third weaknesses. Moreover, the teens are neither given a choice whether they want to participate, nor do the camp leaders consider the damaging psychological effects that this affective activity may have on sensitive individuals, representing mistakes four and five. They further fail to adhere to didactic warnings that prohibit the assigning of roles that "represent real-life oppression (racial or gender lines, for example)" to young people,[12] a sixth limitation.

Without properly discussing the reasons for or the objectives of the curious form of entertainment (a seventh flaw in the RPG), Camp Director Bobby Z. simply tells the campers: "'You're lucky to be here in America. All of us are. For just one day we'd

like you to pretend otherwise.'"[13] Although left unstated, Bobby Z.'s explanation of the RPG rules seems to evoke commonly held American perspectives on the Holocaust, which interpret Hitler's rise to power and the state-sanctioned mass murder as an affective educational opportunity for moral and civic development. For this group, as Pascale R. Bos explains, the Holocaust is interpreted as "a failure of democratic institutions from which one can learn . . . to have compassion for the victims in the hope that this breeds better citizens and prevents future genocides."[14] Evoking America as "the promised land" in this context is to be viewed with caution and as an eighth weakness of the RPG. It is a well-known fact that the United States did little to support the efforts of Jews trying to escape from Nazi-controlled Europe, deportation to concentration camps, and later war-torn Europe.[15] Instead of dealing with reasons for the Holocaust, America's initial indifference to Nazi persecution of European Jews, and the deeper meaning of the Holocaust for Jewish American identity today, the camp leadership creates an ill-conceived simulation activity that provides no proper pedagogical, historical, or cultural contextualization.

Historically speaking, Lodz—officially known as Litzmannstadt during Nazi rule—was completely sealed off from the outside world on April 20, 1940. The time for attaining visas to other countries, therefore, had long expired by November 1, 1940, the day the RPG takes place. In contrast to other ghettos, in which some Jews could conduct business or be sent to work in non-Jewish parts of town during the day, Lodz effectively was a heavily patrolled "permanent prison."[16] An empty corridor or "no-man's land between the Jewish quarter and the 'Aryan' part of the city" had been established, circumstances complicated by the local ethnic German minority's loyalty to the Nazis. Consequently, virtually no news from the outside managed to seep through. Any activity suggesting that escape from Lodz Ghetto in November 1940 was possible is not only misleading but also without historical foundation, a ninth flaw.

While some campers blindly follow authority and immediately embrace the RPG by trying to locate family members and friends, an odd camper nicknamed "Kron" voices the central question of the story: "How are we supposed to remember what we never knew in the first place?"[18] In other words, how are young people, two or more generations removed from the Holocaust with no direct or only a distanced familiar connection to that genocide, supposed to overcome their estrangement to, or ignorance about, the Holocaust, especially if they do not identify with Judaism or if they have not been brought up as Jews? The suffering of Holocaust victims and survivors is particularly unimaginable for Lizzie, who "once asked an old woman on a Santa Monica beach if the numbers tattooed on her arm were her phone number."[19] Being Jewish does not ensure that Jewish Americans automatically understand history and feel compassion for Holocaust survivors, just as Holocaust education in school does

not guarantee that students are informed or curious about the Holocaust, as the surveys mentioned above illustrate.

As the "game" progresses, the two misfits—Lizzie and Kron—protest the activity by going into hiding as a number of European Jews did to avoid deportation. They seek refuge in the desecrated synagogue/kitchen off-limits to campers. Unlike Anne Frank, who "'survived years in an attic, barely talking above a whisper,'" the two resisters are soon discovered and split up, but not before Kron comically vomits at will and is sent to the infirmary. Orna, a camp counselor, goads Lizzie into participating in the RPG, questioning her identity as a Jew if she does not: "'Whatsa matter, Lizzie?' a voice says. 'You afraid of being a Jew?'"[20] For Orna, Jewishness seems fixed in the past, in mass historical trauma, a position not shared by all Jews. For Rabbi Micha Odenheimer, Jewish identity is instead "rooted in culture, tradition or customs that can be lived, enjoyed, and celebrated."[21] The latter view is absent from the story and adds to the narrative's satirical force.

As the tension mounts, Lizzie is escorted back to the game, where she learns that some campers have mysteriously disappeared and that Bobby Z is collecting real money at the gate to freedom. The line between play-acting and reality has become blurred. While waiting for a visa, Lizzie begins to think about the character whose identity she has assumed: "I wonder what her life was like. . . . I think of those train tracks, skin stretched thin over bones, and those in my family who never made it out. I won't let that happen to me."[22] In this passage, Lizzie's engagement with Anya's photo stirs up memories of the teen's own family history. Recalling stories of deportation and horrific photographs of emaciated concentration camp prisoners, Anya's image comes to life. Historical photographs of a harrowing past serve as "ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world," which enables its observer, "in the present, not only to see and to touch the past but also try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic 'take.'"[23] Surviving photographs of Holocaust victims defeat Nazi attempts to erase them and their culture. The fragmented photographic evidence testifies to the lives of individuals robbed of their existence and human dignity while speaking to the hearts and minds of their beholder.

The Holocaust is becoming real to Lizzie who exhibits signs of postmemory. The term "postmemory" refers to the connection that the decedents of Holocaust survivors have to the psychological, social, and cultural trauma of the past, which they can only "remember" through the narratives, pictures, and cultural practices. However, the survivors' experiences were communicated to them in such a way that they appear to be actual memories. Therefore, the true mechanism by which postmemory connects to the past is not recall but rather "imaginative investment, projection, and creation."[24]

Those more than a generation removed from or without direct familiar ties to the Holocaust may be considered "adoptive witnesses" if they experience the Holocaust through the lens of survivor trauma as if those memories were their own.[25] As an adoptive witness, Lizzie imagines what is not actually pictured on Anya's photo: "skin stretched thin over bones." Lizzie recalls the disturbing images imprinted in her memory as if she were directly in danger: "I won't let that happen to me."[26] Shaken by postmemory, with tears in her eyes, Lizzie may not pass into the promised land, she must find another means of escape.

After a traumatic run-in with a camper enthusiastically playing a guard, who throws the narrator to the ground and repeatedly defiles her with the racial epithet "Jew," Lizzie eventually escapes the physical and mental assault at the cost of losing her dignity and her shoes. Forced to walk barefoot on jagged rocks, she is literally and metaphorically losing her footing when she exclaims: "This fucked-up game isn't funny anymore."[27] It should further be noted that the guard, "played" by a Jewish American camper, is asked to personify a perpetrator, the tenth questionable aspect of the RPG.

The scene is reminiscent of Philip Zimbardo's controversial 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE), which set out to study whether American prison guards' brutality stems from sadistic personalities or their situational environment. After submitting to a psychological profile, volunteers who showed no abnormal disposition to authoritarian behavior were randomly assigned roles as guards or prisons in a mock prison. Within six days, the psychological and physical abuse of prisoners became so grave that Zimbardo abruptly ended his study. Consequentially, filling authoritarian roles with life—as the SPE suggests—may lead to unexpected or even horrific outcomes. Responsible simulation pedagogy stipulates that students have "the permission to act in response to evil, rather than being forced to embody it."[28]

When faced with further decision-making required by the RPG, Lizzie struggles with complicity as well. In the next episode, she stumbles upon the chaotic amphitheater in which people are bartering for their freedom. Refusing to trade her actual grandmother's earrings for safe passage, the narrator instead finds herself selling out her associate Kron: "I want out so badly. I feel as if I'm peering over the edge of a cliff when I say, 'What if I have information on a fugitive?'"[29] Betraying her only ally at camp for the sake of her own survival, Lizzie's dark side of human nature is revealed.

With a visa in hand, Lizzie happens to meet Jesse, whose character in the "game" turns out to be Moishe Ossevsheva, Anya's husband. Although Jesse already has a girlfriend, he previously showed interest in Lizzie. The confused narrator is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by him. Using Moishe and Anya's marital status as an excuse to mess around, Jesse makes aggressive sexual advances to which Lizzie

reluctantly falls prey: "And his lips are on mine and he's right but oh so wrong and I feel both small and large, beautiful and grotesque, so unlike myself that I'm not sure I'm even there. . . . I don't want to think about Kron and Anya, but they're all I see. I'm horrible and I'll do anything."[30]

Feelings of passion are out of place amid a Holocaust RPG. Still, they represent an irrational reaction to the immense stress and guilt Lizzie is emotionally unable to handle.[31] She vacillates between extremes: right and wrong, small and large, beautiful and grotesque. As Liora Gubkin comments, "When the boundaries of self are violated, trust in both self and world are diminished, and with them the certainties of knowledge."[32] Traumatized, Lizzie's confused sense of self causes her to lose control and behave in a way that she would not under normal circumstances. The Holocaust RPG would be difficult for anyone to handle, but it is particularly overwhelming for Lizzie, a teen in the midst of her parent's separation, a teen insecure about her social and religious identities.

In the final paragraphs of the narrative, the rising tension reaches its climax before abruptly falling as the story finds closure. The romantic interlude mentioned above turns sour when Jesse begins to worry that his girlfriend will catch him cheating. Lizzie spitefully takes the ID out of his pocket: "'You don't even have a visa, Jew. This isn't going to get you far.' My voice trembles. . . . 'You thought you were going to touch me? You and your dirty Jewish ways?' . . . 'Jew,' I practically coo. 'Now why would I ever have married a Jew like you?'"[33] Caught between reality and the RPG, the narrator destroys Jesse's ID as he walks away. Using the slur "Jew," Lizzie attempts to assert her power over her role-play spouse and humiliate him by exhibiting behavior that reveals a troubled relationship to her own identity.

Haunted by postmemory, her betrayal of Kron, and the anti-Semitic act of revenge against Jesse, the Holocaust RPG has shaken the unwilling participant to the core: "I look at my own ID one last time, at that face, those eyes, so familiar, staring back at me, and I am dizzy with recognition. Carefully, I tear the green slip of paper apart. Anya's face becomes speckles on the rocks in the drying creek. As much as I wish it were otherwise, the speckles remain; there isn't enough of the stream to carry them away."[34] Lizzie could have actually "won" the game with a visa in hand, but she instead destroys her ID and defiantly ends the RPG. With that act of self-determination, the story ends. Lizzie destroys the card, but the lasting speckles of memory remain. The RPG will haunt the narrator—and readers—for some time to come. The RPG has elicited Lizzie's deep identification with and empathy for Anya, but it simultaneously triggers postmemory.

The RPG has failed to further an appreciation for American citizenship, actual events, and Jewish American identity. Instead, Lizzie has become both victim and

offender, two opposing roles with which she will have to come to terms. The "lesson" Lizzie learns is that she has the inherent ability to injure others: "I'm horrible and I'll do anything."[35] This kind of realization that might well emerge from participating in RPGs is potentially "deeply scarring and psychologically harmful," the eleventh shortcoming of this simulation.[36] Gubkin echoes the sentiment, warning against "'wound[ing] the mind' through intentional, sustained attention to understand acts of extreme violence that violate the integrity of the self."[37]

Umansky's story implicitly asks more questions than it answers: What did the unidentified initiators of the Holocaust RPG hope to gain by forcing vulnerable Jewish teens to participate? What led and leads ordinary people to ignore or suppress their empathy for fellow humans to become part of the machinery of hatred? What is the relationship between the Holocaust and Jewish American identity today? How should the Holocaust in all its complexity be remembered and taught to new generations? These questions and others that students produce after discussing the story can serve as a basis for further inquiry and research.

"How to Make it to the Promised Land" will leave most readers with the distinct impression that attempting to evoke victim identification through a Holocaust role-playing game is likely to blunder: "No simulation, or visit to a museum or an historical site can come close to the actual thoughts and feelings of Holocaust victims, of slaves in the time of Lincoln, or of soldiers in the Roman Empire."[38] As Holocaust educator Pascale R. Bos explains: "In actuality, a deep form of identification that would take on the experiences of Holocaust victims would be unbearable and unmanageable for students."[39] In their Holocaust teaching guidelines, the USHMM also warns that Holocaust simulation exercises are "pedagogically unsound. The activities may engage students, but they often forget the purpose of the lesson and, even worse, they are left with the impression that they now know what it was like to suffer or even to participate during the Holocaust."[40] In addition to asking some students to identify with anti-Semitic perpetrators, simulations may encourage negative views of victims.[41] While the theme of questionable Holocaust education does not play a central role in Englander's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank," it does serve as the basis for one of the character's unhealthy Holocaust fixation.

Englander grew up in an Orthodox Jewish community on Long Island and attended yeshiva school, where he was instructed that another Holocaust was imminent. In an interview with Terry Gross, Englander explains that even though his family has been living in the United States for four or five generations, because of his religious education, he regularly lived in a state of fear. This fear led him to have a mindset similar to that of a survivor's child. Like Umansky, the idea for the story stems from an actual "game" Englander played:

> And we [Englander and his sister] would play this game, . . . wondering who would hide us. And this is—this story I've been carrying in my head from 20 years ago. But I remember what my sister said about a couple we knew. She said, he would hide us and she would turn us in. And it struck me so deeply, and I put it on the neighbors in this story. But I just couldn't shake that thought for all these years because it's true. . . . So I guess—in a sense, . . . it's normality, this game. And I just took a step back and said my God, we're pathological.[42]

The fear instilled in Englander as a child, the "game," and his sister's words inform his story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank." The three elements are rearranged and blended with the familiar storyline in Raymond Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" (1981). In Carver's famous short story, two couples sit around a kitchen table while talking about the meaning of love and drinking too much gin until there is a long devastating silence. In Englander's version, two middle-aged Jewish couples, one Hasidic and the other secular, sit around a table drinking vodka and smoking pot. The binge ends with the couples "playing" the "Righteous Gentile game," otherwise known as "The Anne Frank game," followed by ominous silence.[43]

At the beginning of Englander's story, the comical verbal sparring between the opinionated narrator and his ultra-Orthodox visitor, Mark, generates considerable tension. Mark, who prefers his Jewish name "Yerucham" or "Yeri," and his wife, Shoshana, formerly named Lauren, left the United States for Israel twenty years ago. When Shoshana meets the narrator's wife, Debbie, for a reunion after many years of separation, the husbands exchange sarcastic remarks packaged as insult humor and pass judgment on the other couple's interpretation of Judaism. Yeri initiates the confrontational banter by lecturing the others on Israeli occupation immediately upon arrival to the Floridian couple's home. He repeatedly indicates his disapproval for secular Jews. At one point, he comically refers to the narrator's sixteen-year-old son, as "Rumpleforeskin" because Yeri assumes that his hosts' son has yet to be circumcised.[44] As Roberta Rosenberg posits, "Religion and nationality combine to make Yuri's worldview a confrontational dualism ('us' vs. 'them')—those who are 'real' Jews . . . and those who are not."[45] In Englander's story, aggressive humor reveals and ridicules the disunity and bickering among Jews in society today. Sociologist Arlene Stein, for instance, likens "conversations that occur in Jewish communities" to "a cacophonous mix of discordant voices."[46]

The strained atmosphere starts to improve when the couples begin to drink alcohol, and Yeri recounts his father's encounter with a fellow Holocaust survivor in a locker room of a local country club. The identification numbers assigned to the two men at Auschwitz are just three digits apart, indicating that they were literally at the same place and time when they were tattooed. Instead of sharing a story of trauma

and reunion, as the narrator's wife longs for, the two men incongruously make light of the situation, exemplifying Jewish survival humor. Yeri's father quips, "'All that means is, he cut ahead of me in line. There same as here. This guy's a cutter, I just didn't want to say.' 'Blow it out your ear,' the other guy says. And that's it." Clearly, Debbie's obsession with, and her desire for, authentic Holocaust narratives is unhealthy: "She was expecting something empowering. Some story with which to educate [her son] Trevor, to reconfirm her belief in the humanity that, from inhumanity forms."[47] Whereas Debbie furthers the notion firmly rooted in American pedagogy that positive or uplifting universal lessons can be drawn from the Holocaust,[48] Yuri criticizes the idea of the Holocaust as the sole basis for religious identity: "You can't build Judaism only on the foundation of one terrible crime."[49] Yuri's concern seems to apply to Debbie's identity more than he knows.

The Holocaust is not directly part of Debbie's family history; she is several generations removed both geographically and spiritually from European Jewry. Yet according to the narrator, she does not view it that way: "It's like she's a survivor's kid, my wife. It's crazy, that education they give them. Her grandparents were all born in the Bronx, but it's like, I don't know. It's like here we are twenty minutes from downtown Miami, but really it's 1937 and we live on the edge of Berlin."[50]

Although Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory is usually applied to the children of Holocaust survivors, Debbie's experience—like Lizzie's—does reflect Hirsch's concept. Even as an ethnic Jew who lacks direct familial ties to fragmented Holocaust memories, Debbie may be an "adoptive witness."[51] She seems, however, to have "traumatic recall but (unlike posttraumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove," resulting from other mediated experiences and cultural memory.[52] For Debbie, delayed intergenerational transmission of past traumatic experiences has become the primary factor affecting her identity so that she directly identifies with the reality of the Holocaust as if it had directly happened to her. Her preoccupation with the Holocaust seems to be a product of yeshiva education, as alluded to in the narrator's statement above.

Debbie is likely a victim of the "shock and awe" approach to Holocaust education, a term used to describe extreme teaching methods that introduce students to the horrors of genocide.[53] The purpose is to generate strong emotions that deepen empathy and further moral responsibility, thereby reducing radical attitudes.[54] Shock and awe approaches may include, for instance, forcing students to look at photographs or watch film footage documenting crematoriums, mass murder, and malnourished prisoners at Nazi concentration camps, a practice some frustrated teachers may use in response to their students' disinterest in the Holocaust.[55] Educators at Yad Vashem explicitly warn against these practices: "Photographs displaying piles of

corpses cause learners to feel defensive and even disgust rather than empathy with the victims."[56]

The extent to which Debbie has become an adoptive witness to the Holocaust becomes evident in the episode that leads directly to the Anne Frank game. While high on marijuana, the couples begin to prance in the rain, realize they have an extreme case of the munchies, and find themselves in Debbie's large, well-stocked pantry. Upon seeing it, Shoshana asks whether Debbie is "expecting a nuclear winter." Poking fun at his wife's obsession, the narrator explains that it is their "secret hiding place."[57] Debbie's stockpile of large amounts of supplies is the result of postmemory, of the affective "imaginative investment" Hirsch describes.[58] In other words, the fear of a second Holocaust has led Debbie to prepare for the worst, for going into hiding if necessary.

Next, the pantry discussion leads the couples to "play" the Anne Frank game that Debbie has apparently participated in since her childhood. The rules stipulate that the participants must consider which of their Christian friends would hide them in the event of an American Holocaust. The narrator begins by using their neighbors across the street as an example. The husband, Mitch, would "lay down his life for what's right," but the wife would not. It is now Debbie's turn. Though her marriage is less than perfect, she agrees that her husband would save her and her son, but when the time comes for Shoshana to play, she exhibits signs of a struggle: "And you can tell Shoshana is thinking of her kids, though that's not part of the scenario. You can tell that she's changed part of the imagining. And she says, after a pause, yes, but she's not laughing. She says, yes, but to him it sounds as it does to us, so that he is now asking and asking. But wouldn't I? Wouldn't I hide you? Even if it was life and death—if it would spare you, and they'd kill me alone for doing it? Wouldn't I?" They all know the answer but "no one will say what cannot be said—that this wife believes her husband would not hide her."[59] With that horrific insight, the otherwise chatty characters silence themselves, and the story finds its shocking conclusion.

The seemingly innocent game that begins as a playful thought experiment metamorphoses into betrayal of the worst kind. The characters are, as Roberta Rosenburg has aptly remarked, "absurdly trapped in the attics of their own catastrophic imaginations, clearly unable to find their way out."[60] The devout Hasidic Jew and otherwise devoted husband, who has repeatedly asserted his religious and moral superiority over his secular Jewish hosts, is revealed to be a weak hypocrite who would not even sacrifice himself for his wife, the mother of his ten children. It becomes clear to all that "devotion to Orthodox law is all he and Lauren [Shoshana] share."[61]

To conclude this section, Umansky and Englander have taken unique but complementary approaches to the Holocaust in short story writing. They create charac-

ters (Lizzie and Debbie, respectively) who struggle to understand what it means to be Jewish in America today and how the Holocaust might factor into their identities. Both short stories reveal potential dangers lurking behind emotionally-based approaches to the Holocaust that promote an excessive preoccupation with the Holocaust. They also underscore the unpredictability of affective Holocaust activities on its participants and question concepts of Jewish identity that rely exclusively on the Holocaust.

As shown above, these stories are full of concerns that need to be brought to both pre-service and in-service teachers, especially those who are asked to teach about the Holocaust but who have not received formal training on the subject matter. They are likely to be well-meaning but may not be familiar with multi-perspective interpretations of Holocaust history, post-memory, or the literature dating back to the late 1970s that rejects pedagogical attempts to "experience" or imagine the Holocaust through simulations. These studies showed that affectoriented approaches were found to leave students with a poor understanding of historical context and failed to produce better, more empathetic citizens.[62] Additionally, it was questioned whether "emotional shock equated to 'liberal' indoctrination," so that affective methods for Holocaust education were largely disregarded by the end of that decade.[63]

It was also during the 1970s that Hans-Georg Wehling published the findings of a conference held by the Baden-Württemberg Agency for Civic Education that would later become known as the "Beutelsbacher Konsens" ("Beutelsbach Consensus"). One of its core principles prohibits the overwhelming of students to the extent that they become indoctrinated with one-sided information and thus prohibited from critically formulating an independent opinion: "It is not permissible to catch students offguard, by whatever means, for the sake of imparting desirable opinions, thereby hindering them from 'forming an independent judgment.' This is the difference between political education and indoctrination. Indoctrination is incompatible with the role of a teacher in a democratic society and the generally accepted objective of making students capable of independent responsibility and maturity (*Mündigkeit*)."[64]

The Beutelsbach Consensus further stipulates that teachers provide students with the necessary skills and training to be able to critically analyze political situations and to assess their own personal interests and biases. The Beutelsbach Consensus continues to serve as a minimum standard for religious and civic education in the German-speaking countries. Due to the current controversies outlined in the following section, its findings should be included in more teacher training and Holocaust education programs.

Although it is safe to say that disturbing history games and RPGs have never completely disappeared,[65] it would seem that they are starting to resurface in greater

numbers in the U.S. and beyond. In 2019, three incidents involving slavery RPG lessons caused outrage. In a fifth-grade class in New York, one teacher had her black students "play" slaves at a slave auction only to be bid on by white students, and a fourth-grade teacher in North Carolina required her students to participate in an Underground Railroad board game that would punish players by sending them back to their plantations as slaves if they took "too many wrong turns."[66] In September 2019, a "Slave Ship" exercise in an eighth-grade social studies class in Russiaville, Indiana, which had been done for the previous five years, was met with parental resistance and canceled. The role-play "called for students to portray bound, enslaved Africans aboard a vessel returning to the Americas" in an attempt to foster empathy for the capture and transport of slaves across the Atlantic.[67]

In February 2021, "Willkommen in Wiederstand: Das NS-Escapegame" ("Welcome to Resistance: The NS Escape Game"), a digital escape room game for ninth- and tenth-graders in Germany, appeared on Padlet. The mission explained in an audio file set to eerie music is to free Nazi prisoners by cracking a combination padlock on the door to the room where they are being held. If caught, resisters will be executed for treason. To successfully complete the first mission, students must answer random history questions, such as when Black Friday in the U.S. was or if women in the Weimar Republic were briefly emancipated. In the second mission, resisters watch an informational video on concentration camps and then solve a puzzle. The third mission involves Nazi propaganda. No debriefing has been included.

In this anti-intellectual game named after the resistance, the resistance is neither specified geographically nor historically framed. It may even mislead students into believing that all resistance groups had the same goals. Ironically, apart from their propaganda, information on National Socialists is surprisingly absent from the "NS Escape Game." It is also troubling that the real identity of the game's creator—who used the moniker "Mann_mit_Klasse und Maske" and had over 6,000 Twitter followers in 2021—is unknown. His account has since disappeared but it should be noted that using teaching materials with technical gimmicks created by a person whose credentials are unknown, a person without tangible accountability is unwise.

Then, there are also those who seek to profit financially from the Holocaust through commercial computer games and escape rooms. A few examples will have to suffice. For instance, in the first-person shooter *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (MachineGames, 2014), players infiltrate a fictional Nazi concentration camp.[68] In 2017, a Czech company closed its "Auschwitz-themed 'escape room'" due to heavy criticism.[69] In 2019, responding to international media scrutiny, another popular 60-minute escape room set in 1939 changed its name from Schindler's List to Secret Agent. The objective for this RPG located in Thessaloniki, Greece, has remained the same: to find essential

documents, compile a list of innocents, and save some by hiring them for factory work.[70]

Finally, for-profit organizations market Holocaust teaching materials, such as Teachers pay Teachers. It is a global educational platform that offers three million free and paid resources to K–12 teachers.[71] A search for the term "Holocaust" revealed over 3,500 results.[72] Although exhaustive research would go far beyond the scope of this essay, the organization does sell problematic Holocaust "games" and simulation activities, including "World War 2—What would you have done? Controversial Class Discussion!" by Creating History ("what if" scenarios made up of a few sentences that allow students only eight minutes to answer). Yet it also seems that Teachers pay Teachers' reporting system may lead to the removal of other problematic games. *Train Ride to Auschwitz* by Haulbrook Hall a (simulation about the inhumane railcar transport and its spatial dimensions), which I reviewed in 2021, has since been removed. It is unclear to how many subscribers it was sold to before it was removed.

These select examples demonstrate that a more comprehensive interdisciplinary effort is needed to ensure that history simulations and RPGs—if used at all—have clear learning objectives. They need to be age-appropriate, include accurate contextual information, and in-depth, meaningful post-activity reflection. Teachers should consider whether their students have the emotional intelligence as well as the necessary knowledge and skills to analyze hypothetical moral dilemmas as required by the Beutelsbach Consensus. Moreover, when considering simulation or role-play activities, teachers should consult with experienced colleagues and, ideally, their school principal before using a new role-play. It would further be wise to inform parents in advance as well as allow students to voice their concerns and withdraw from activities at any time. Teachers should also avoid assigning grades to simulation, role-play, and "what-if" exercises, since it is hard to grade reflection objectively. In fact, students may behave before, during, or after the role-plays according to the way they believe their teachers want them to so that they receive the best possible grade. Furthermore, roles should also not overlap with students' actual gender or racial characteristics, and educators should refrain from using shock-and-awe approaches that expect participants to identify with perpetrators. And most importantly, simulation and role-play exercises must avoid causing psychological harm and/or trauma to participants.

Although there are still some who argue that Holocaust simulations may be beneficial if teachers exercise caution as well as sound pedagogy,[73] the considerations listed above suggest that it is challenging to prepare for all eventualities. The potential pitfalls, including damage to student-teacher relationships, likely outweigh any potential benefits, especially since there are many other, less controversial ways of

achieving Holocaust learning objectives.

In the digital age, Jewish organizations and a few concerned educators cannot alone police the internet for the type of careless and destructive materials described in this essay. Creating pedagogically sound Holocaust activities and supporting Holocaust education must be a global effort. We all—students, parents, administrators, teachers, digital educational platform executives, and scholars—need to care more about the quality and use of Holocaust-themed materials and speak up when we encounter activities and games that make us feel uncomfortable. We need to proactively address these issues instead of waiting to "cancel" uninformed individuals when they produce problematic teaching materials. In particular, this article is a call for American studies programs at institutions of higher learning inside and outside the United States involved in the training of pre-service English and history teachers to seek out opportunities to raise awareness for and to participate in the discourses on affective learning. Teaching Nathan Englander's and Ellen Umansky's short stories may be one way of achieving those aims.

Notes

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9 Umansky, "How to Make it," 327.

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52 Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 6.

53 Gubkin, "Empathetic Understanding," 113.

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Reviews

edited by
Joshua Parker

Abstract

Nassim Balestrini reviews *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First-Century Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Martin Gabriel reviews *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (Picador, 2020); Marijana Mikić reviews *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century* (The Ohio State University Press, 2020); Philipp Reisner reviews *Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019); and Emily Edwards reviews *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019); and.

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Reviews

edited by
Joshua Parker

The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First-Century American Poetry. Edited by Timothy Yu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), xix, 246pp.

Nassim Balestrini, University of Graz
DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v3i1.143

This volume in the well-established Cambridge Companion series demonstrates—through its array of authors and through related reflections in several essays—the closely intertwined worlds of scholars and poets in twenty-first-century North American academia. Half of the contributors are published poets or, to put it differently, poets who are also scholars or vice versa. They teach, write, and do research in a variety of departments. This variety in itself indicates the disciplinary multiplicity of the new kind of poetry studies which this volume promotes. The editor, Timothy Yu, is a prominent scholar of American and Asian American literatures whose publications have contributed greatly to opening up highly necessary and new ways of approaching contemporary American poetry and of seeing Asian American poetry within the larger context of American poetry.[1] Needless to say, he is also a poet.[2] In addition to affiliations with English departments and American studies programs, the other contributors work in African American studies, African diaspora studies, comparative race and ethnic studies, comparative literature, gender studies, American Indian studies, writing/rhetoric, sociology, and teacher training. Fittingly, the volume's closing essay by Dorothy Wang addresses why and how old-school "poetry studies" as traditionally practiced in English departments in English-speaking North America needs to be replaced by approaches commensurate with the immense breadth of so-called American poetry.

Is it too early for a volume on twenty-first-century American poetry in the year 2021? Timothy Yu asks this question in his introduction, but then allays fears related to the lack of temporal distance and of canonization processes by arguing that "[s]hifting our attention away from individual, canonical writers and from dominant

critical narratives is in fact very much in keeping with the multiple centers of gravity that increasingly characterize American poetry" (1). The feasibility of truly acknowledging the gravitational pull of numerous hubs from which American poetry has been emerging appears particularly realistic because the last two decades produced more scholarly literature on non-white authors, more research by non-white scholars, and more awareness of "distinct poetic traditions informing the work of poets of color and Native poets" (4). Non-white poets have seized new communicative options offered by so-called new media (8), have supported each other in poets' networks (9), and become increasingly visible in creative writing programs (19). On the one hand, controversies and conflicts blossomed in abundance along this somewhat promising path; on the other hand, these developments firmly established a sense of crisis (11) and the topic of race (12) as central concerns.

How, then, does this essay collection "reevaluate, revise, and rewrite the frameworks" (1) that evolved between 1945 and the end of the previous century? The volume does not contain any essay that is dedicated to one author. Instead, the overview-oriented contributions discuss (a) poets subsumed under an umbrella term tied to ethnicity, cultural tradition, gender, or sexuality; (b) a specific aesthetic or genre; or (c) poetic forms in response to twenty-first-century predicaments and crises. Among the four essays on African American, Asian American, Latina/o, and Indigenous poetries, the first and the last ones are particularly satisfying in terms of their argumentative depth. Both discuss contemporary authors with an extensive historical tradition in mind. Keith D. Leonard ("New Black Aesthetics: Post–Civil Rights African American Poetry," 17–30) convincingly argues that internalizing African American cultural history has served as a crucial prerequisite for the "aesthetic freedom" (18; also see 29) with which contemporary poets practice their art. Poets like Natasha Trethewey thematize the interdependence of sociopolitical history and individual experience by elevating innovative poetic forms in order to "remake the black historical self" (23). Mishuana Goeman's contribution, "Sovereign Poetics and Possibilities in Indigenous Poetry" (61–70), makes an equally strong case for Native American poets' methods of dismantling Western, settler-colonial notions of time and mis-uses of language (see 61, 62, 65). Her analysis of Layli Long Soldier's poetic techniques (66–67) leads up to her conclusion, in which she claims: "Words matter, as poets so deftly show, so does their dismembering in settler common-sense" (69).

Michael Leong ("Traditions of Innovation in Asian American Poetry," 31–47) provides a fine overview of anthologies and seminal scholarly work (31–32) and then emphasizes the experimental drive of numerous Asian American poets, which he locates in "three major counter-modes": "(1) *a surrealist mode* . . .; (2) *a documental mode* of postmodern montage . . .; and (3) *a phenomenological mode*" (32–33). His partially problematic remarks on Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge (41–43), however, reveal an issue

that the entire collection and current research on American poetry in general have failed to discuss satisfactorily. This issue is the question as to how poetry scholars and historians have been dealing with multiracial, multiethnic, and multinational poets. Leong's broad claim about the impact of a "mixed-race, multicultural identity" (41) on Berssenbrugge's work seems hurried and unclear. As the volume under review argues, more work needs to be done in moving away from privileging white poets in scholarship. At the same time, scholars need to acknowledge that reducing poets to one component of their racial, ethnic, or multinational heritage can limit and distort the perception of the artist's work.

Several essays on specific aesthetics or groups of poets read like encyclopedia entries that swiftly move from a sentence or two about one poet to an equally brief remark on the next author. These essays are useful when looking for new texts that one could read, explore, or teach. At the same time, it is often hard to gauge whether the claims about specific techniques and schools of thought possess sufficient depth. Despite the immense ground that they cover, some contributors manage to shift areas of inquiry into the spotlight that—more often than not—are not discussed in overview publications. For example, Declan Gould's "Disability Aesthetics and Poetic Practice" (106–119) usefully explains how poets have developed stylistic approaches with specific audiences in mind. Gould also points out how the diverse field of various disability poetics should be studied in conjunction with concerns like race and gender and with broader societal understandings of disability as distinct from pathology in mind (115).

Jonathan Skinner's "Blockade Chants and Cloud-Nets: Terminal Poetics of the Anthropocene" (147–68) masterfully addresses the ways in which the apocalyptic scenarios popularly associated with environmental disaster and climate change exacerbate the debate about "poetry's relevance" (147)—a debate that has been particularly rampant since the 1990s. By zeroing in on four poets, Skinner manages to develop and undergird claims about something like a new kind of intersectionality which scrutinizes "ports" as "regions of transition between biological communities" that "become productive within capital" (152). He also plausibly demonstrates how poets argue that their art transcends mere "description" and rather becomes an "act" (157). Thus, protest and activism have also found expression in highly innovative poetic forms that are decidedly not meant for the ivory tower but that instead aim at broad exposure and social change.

Comparable to exploring poetry and/about environmental activism in terms of the interrelation of aesthetic strategies and political content, research on the role of warfare in contemporary poetry offers new vistas in a subject area that—like poetry traditions that address notions of nature and of the (non)human—is simultaneously

ancient and currently topical. Stephen Voyce ("Of Poetry and Permanent War in the Twenty-First-Century," 191–205) finds that the "most sustained treatment [of war] appears in three overlapping communities: Middle Eastern American poetries, documentary poetics (or "docpo"), and left communist circles" (193). His claim that "the weaponization of language" (199) often works on the basis of banal words that veil what is really being described connects these poems with the equally treacherous language of settler colonialism and discrimination that are central to other essays in the companion. Importantly, Voyce concludes that contemporary war writing does not focus on the soldier but rather on the suffering of civilians and on "the economic and political machinery of national security" (202). Thus, understanding current war poetry requires a shift similar to the one Yu suggests in the introduction—namely one of decentering those who, for the longest time, seemed to be the "natural" protagonists within specific thematic areas.

As indicated at the beginning, this essay collection keeps poets' and scholars' perspectives in view—for one thing, through half of the contributors' backgrounds as artists and academics. The second component in achieving this double perspective can be found in the two closing essays, which discuss creative writing programs and poetry studies at North American universities, respectively. To Kimberly Quiogue Andrews ("Poetry in the Program Era," 206–219), some poets manage to "fold. . . an explicitly hermeneutic practice or process into the poetry itself" which makes "the speaking subject . . . an actively, discursively analytical subject" (212). Regarding Myung Mi Kim and Claudia Rankine, she argues that both "reconfigure the personal in service of the more broadly intellectual" (216)—a conclusion that resembles Leonard's above-mentioned reading of Natasha Trethewey's method of intertwining historical consciousness and contemporary experience. In contrast to Andrews's focus on what she understands as a positive effect of creative writing programs, Dorothy Wang opens her polemical and programmatic discussion, "The Future of Poetry Studies" (220–33), with an indictment of those who oppose a new direction in the field. This new direction acknowledges that, first, "it is possible to pay close attention to formal properties of a poem and take into account the historical and sociopolitical contexts of a poem and the large role ideologies and institutional structures and practices play, both in the production and in the reception of poems"; second, that scholars must stop reading non-white poets ethnographically (221); and third, that poetic forms can embody "concrete materialities and structures of power" (223). After critiquing recent publications by scholars whose works she finds wanting, Wang suggests six specific measures to remedy the situation (229–30). Her suggestions overlap with Yu's and specify, for example, the demand for new analytical frameworks, especially those suggested by non-white, non–North American, and non–English language theorists whose ideas enliven our understanding of poetics

and of language. Echoing Toni Morrison, Wang closes with highlighting "poems themselves" as sources of theoretical deliberations (230). Particularly this last point poignantly concludes the volume with an assertion of the cultural and sociopolitical relevance of poetry.

The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First-Century American Poetry comes like a breath of fresh air in the world of such series by academic publishers. While several contributions do not convince this reviewer, the collection certainly offers ample food for thought, as do the "Chronology" (xi–xix; compiled by Timothy Yu and Jacqulyn Teoh) that precedes the introductory essay and the (rather brief, but still helpful) "Further Reading" section (234–37; compiled by Timothy Yu and Caroline Hensley). This volume links up quite well with the equally welcome innovative impetus of the extensive and variegated *Cambridge History of American Poetry* (ed. Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt, 2014),[3] which also follows a highly insightful revisionist trajectory. For scholars interested in contemporary poetry in the United States and for instructors who want their students to strive toward developing innovative research projects, *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First-Century American Poetry* is definitely an asset.

Notes

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2 See, for instance, Timothy Yu, *100 Chinese Silences* (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2016).

3 Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States. By Daniel Immerwahr (New York: Picador, 2020), 516pp.

Martin Gabriel, University of Klagenfurt

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Daniel Immerwahr's *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* features an introductory chapter that centers on the Japanese attacks in the Pacific in December 1941. While few strategists would have doubted the strategic value of outlying U.S. possessions such as Guam, Howland, and Wake Island (and even less the Philippines), official discourses marginalized these areas and focused on the attacks on Hawai'i instead. "Pearl Harbor" became synonymous with Japanese aggression, a site that represented an assault on (white) America. In 1940, more than one in every

eight Americans ("subjects" and citizens alike) lived outside the continental United States. "If you lived in the United States on the eve of World War II[,] . . . you were more likely to be colonized than black, by odds of three to two" (11). The author is correct in stating that "race" as a formative factor in U.S. history went far beyond relations between Euro-Americans and African Americans. Immerwahr's considerations regarding the cartographical construction of a non-imperial nation—one that omits "colonial" areas—could tempt the reader to see this as an exceptionalist U.S. project designed to "deny empire"[1]; we should keep in mind, however, that map-making is never neutral, but rather a "part of a range of spatial strategies."[2]

Immerwahr traces the beginnings of U.S. expansionism to the eighteenth century, when settlement of the areas west of the Appalachians turned into a mass movement, much to the chagrin of social elites. A new category of "territories" was established and administered in a quasi-colonial manner. On a continent "substantially cleared of its indigenous population by disease" (33), immigrant communities grew quickly and while earlier settlers had been marginalized as "banditti," politicians began to promote the positively connoted term "pioneer." Existing Native American nations were subsequently displaced from their homelands and, after plans for an "Indian Country" in the western half of the continent had failed to materialize, resettled in modern-day Oklahoma: "It was as if someone had depopulated most of Europe and shunted remnants from each country to an allotment in Romania" (42).

Another chapter of the book is dedicated to the little-known story of the "guano islands," where the world's most important agricultural fertilizer was found in abundance. While guano was mostly found on barren islands, it played a crucial role in late nineteenth-century U.S. expansion. At one point, U.S. activities almost led to war with Peru. Immerwahr's descriptions of such topics are vivid, concise, and promote a highly critical picture of national, imperial, and global history. The same can be said about his comments on the "War of 1898" (and the occupation of former Spanish possessions). U.S. *realpolitik*, racial conceptions, and economic interests quickly became obvious in dealings with independence movements in the Philippines and the Caribbean, respectively. "Filipinos who had besieged Manila . . . at the cost of thousands of lives, thus watched in astonishment as their allies entered the city unopposed, locked Filipino soldiers out, and fraternized with the enemy" (72). On the *mainland*, native populations were excluded from the census until 1890—a highly symbolic gesture based on the myth of a virgin land. "Imperialists" and "anti-imperialists" debated the inclusion of additional "people of color"; in these discussions, racism was omnipresent on both sides, but supported different arguments. Ambivalence was also a personal trait of leading U.S. politicians: "For the inhabitants of the world's colonies, there were two [Woodrow] Wilsons: Wilson the liberator, Wilson the racist" (117). In the Philippines, for example, he supported increased self-administration against many officials who saw

"natives" as unfit for this kind of responsibility. In Puerto Rico, however, hopes for an independent future faded quickly; in 1937, tensions finally culminated in the "Ponce Massacre," the bloodiest shooting by U.S. police in history.

World War II also features quite prominently in Immerwahr's book: the famous Asian American 442nd Infantry Regiment, General MacArthur, Bataan, the fighting for Manila's *Intramuros* district in 1945 are all covered, albeit at different levels of detail. After Japan's surrender, the country "wasn't a U.S. territory like the Philippines. But MacArthur nevertheless ran it as if it were" (225). At the end of 1945, more people were living in US colonies or occupation zones than in "mainland USA." Politicians considered incorporating parts of Japan or even Iceland. Instead, "the United States . . . won a war and *gave up* territory" (229). Immerwahr mentions the widespread—but now little-known—mass protests of GIs against their government and their own presence overseas. He also covers the issue of Hawaiian statehood that came in 1959, after heated controversies regarding race issues.

A lengthy chapter details the bloody history of Puerto Rico between the late 1930s and the 1950s, including a number of nationalist uprisings and a botched assassination attempt on Harry Truman. The following chapter focuses on the replacement of natural by synthetic rubber and its implications for global power. Immerwahr also deals with the Panama Canal, malaria, and DDT; while all of these processes and phenomena deserve attention, sometimes it seems unclear why they were selected and included at particular points. The author then turns to the importance of language. An intriguing chapter summarizes American approaches to language in both national and global contexts. Not only does Immerwahr shed light on the multilingualism of presidents like Mandarin-speaking Herbert Hoover, but he also takes a look at tendencies toward unilingualism, a phenomenon "being increasingly given emblematic status . . . by at least some political forces."[3]

Immerwahr covers the topic of U.S. military bases in Asia and Europe and the civilian settlements surrounding them, spaces that became "bustling borderlands where people from the United States came into frequent contact with foreigners" (356). Whether it was British bands playing for U.S. servicemen during the 1960s, or Japanese protesting against the "Yankee" presence in 1995, military bases turned into focal points of global cultural contact. The U.S. garrison at Dhahran (Saudia Arabia) was of special significance with respect to Muslim sensibilities; in this chapter, a man named Osama bin Laden makes his appearance. But Immerwahr also deals with the question of U.S. bases on Okinawa that resulted in the resignation of Japanese prime minister Hatoyama in 2009, as well as Guam, another crucial point for twenty-first-century U.S. military strategy in the Indo-Pacific area of operations.

The monograph concludes with a discussion of the "citizenship" problem. Instead

of choosing a well-known topic such as Latin American immigration, Immerwahr presents the case of Senator John McCain's and Governor Sarah Palin's 2008 presidential bid. McCain "was born in the Panama Canal Zone, a Guantánamo-like space under exclusive U.S. jurisdiction" (395), while Palin had ties to the Alaskan Independence Party, a movement questioning the legality of Alaska's statehood. The author also states that Donald Trump already laid the base for his presidential campaign in 2011—by publicly doubting the legitimacy of Barack Obama's U.S. citizenship.

To Immerwahr, the United States ("America") is a bona fide empire, even though most of its critics focus on some kind of informal imperialism rather than overseas possessions. By contrast, the author argues that "if there is one thing the history of the Greater United States tells us, it's that such territory *matters*" (400). Immerwahr's book addresses a number of controversial and relevant topics of U.S. history. Beyond glorifying national myths, he deals with diverse forms of imperial policies and politics, focusing specifically on the issue of territoriality. At some points, the reader might get the impression that Immerwahr simply wanted to integrate ever more details or storylines into his monograph, resulting in a loss of coherence. Nonetheless, *How to Hide an Empire* is undeniably a well-founded yet easily comprehensible book. Even if one does not agree with all of the author's hypotheses or conclusions, this monograph offers important suggestions for additional critical discussions regarding a national and global history of the (Greater) United States.

Notes

1 Niall Ferguson, "Empire in Denial: The Limits of US Imperialism," *Harvard International Review* 25, no. 3 (2003): 64–69.

2 Alexander Hidalgo and John F. López, "Introduction: Imperial Geographies and Spatial Memories in Spanish America," *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 11, Special (2012): 3, DOI: 10.1353/lag.2012.0030.

3 Michael Silverstein, "Encountering Language and Languages of Encounter in North American Ethnohistory," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 6, no. 2 (1996): 138, DOI: 10.1525/jlin.1996.6.2.126.

Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century. Edited by Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2020), 248pp.

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Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek's collection introduces a variety of critical perspectives to the study of Black speculative fiction. The editors observe that Afrofuturism has grown well beyond Mark Dery's 1993 "conception of this aesthetic movement

as a uniquely North American and postwar phenomenon" (8). Twenty-first-century iterations of Afrofuturism include African American, Afrodiasporic, and African speculative aesthetics expressed across different media such as literature, music, film, television, comics, and digital art. While the present volume explores the potential of a broadening Afrofuturist landscape, it puts the focus on the print medium, thereby offering a significant contribution to the study of literary Afrofuturism. A series of insightful and highly readable chapters consider a wide array of older and newer texts that address concerns relevant to twenty-first-century Afrofuturism.

The volume is divided into four parts, "Afrofuturism Now," "Afrofuturism in Literary History," "Afrofuturism in Cultural History," and "Afrofuturism and Africa," each preceded by Stacey Robinson's inspiring artworks. The first section opens not with a scholarly investigation but with an author roundtable on Afrofuturism, including seven writers and editors from North America, Europe, and Africa: Bill Campbell, Minister Faust, Nalo Hopkinson, N. K. Jemisin, Chinelo Onwualu, Nisi Shawl, and Nick Wood. Wood poses a straightforward and crucial question, "How many of those ostensibly included underneath the label [of Afrofuturism] see this as a valid term for what they are doing[?]" (28). The answers provided by the participants in the roundtable suggest a soberingly small number. While some embrace it as a marketing tool, and most of them accept that the label is applied to their work, simply because they are too busy producing new creative work, none of them would self-define as "Afrofuturist." Faust, a Kenyan Canadian novelist and vocal critic of the increasingly broad application of Dery's term, points out that he sees no reason to "use such a recent term created by a non-African" (27). While the editors' decision to give creative writers the opportunity to "speak back" to scholars is laudable and refreshing, a follow-up engagement with the questions raised by the writers, especially questions pertaining to the analytical value of the term "Afrofuturism" in relation to pan-African speculative storytelling, could have added another level of critical scrutiny.

In addition to the roundtable, the "Afrofuturism Now" section includes a chapter by pioneering writer and editor Sheree R. Thomas, who offers an overview of the work done by "black women Afrofuturists" (40) in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Thomas argues that in a contemporary landscape that bears the traces of "the cynical cycle that is race relations and white supremacy in America," the speculative literature by Black women writers as varied as Zora Neale Hurston, Octavia E. Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, and Andrea Hairston offers "sites of intervention and reconnection" (38). By communicating the healing power of folk magic and spiritual wisdom, female Afrofuturists are engaged in both "world-breaking" (critiquing the past and present) and "world-making" (imagining more hopeful and liberating futures) (53).

Part II, "Afrofuturism in Literary History," consists of three chapters that investigate how Afrofuturist texts reclaim history to reimagine futurity. De Witt Douglas Kilgore, for example, provides a keen analysis of how alternate history novels, such as Steven Barnes's *Lion's Blood* (2002) and Terry Bisson's *Fire on the Mountain* (1988), not only critique whitewashed history, but also present "a past that is prologue to what we could be" (61). Rebecca Holden elucidates the didactic value of the often-overlooked genre of young adult (YA) Afrofuturism for both Black and non-Black readers. She argues that YA Afrofuturist stories, such as Walter Mosley's neo-slave narrative *47* (2005), invite Black readers to engage with "future worlds where people who look like them not only exist and teach the lessons but also determine what those lessons should be" (91). For non-Black readers, suggests Holden, YA Afrofuturist texts provide a different learning environment: "more than simply creating empathy for and acceptance of the 'other,' YA Afrofuturism stories can help all young adult readers ask questions about what a truly diverse future might look like and what their place within that future might be" (91). While Holden mentions empathy only in passing, engagement with scholarship on narrative empathy might have opened up the opportunity to say even more about *how* these texts address their readerships.[1]

Part III, "Afrofuturism in Cultural History," begins with Mark Bould's chapter, which examines the career of the forgotten twentieth-century African American sf writer John M. Faucette. Bould analyzes the complexities and contradictions of Faucette's work in the context of the racism that shaped his experience as a Black sf writer in the United States. Elizabeth A. Wheeler turns to Sherri L. Smith's YA dystopia *Orleans* (2013), illustrating the ways in which it displays a negative and positive pole of Afrofuturism that invites readers to witness both the "landscapes of environmental sacrifice" (128) *and* the characters' ethics of survival, beauty, and care. Wheeler's chapter draws out illuminating parallels between the water poisoning crises in American cities like Flint and Baltimore and Smith's literary representations of environmental injustice and disability, but there is very little engagement with ecocritical scholarship on these issues. By contrast, Lisa Dowdall's chapter brings Afrofuturism into conversation with the geological turn in the humanities, illustrating how Jemisin's 2015–17 Broken Earth trilogy invites readers to reject dichotomies of exclusion that pertain to "widespread assumptions about the 'natural' divisions between race, species, and matter that underpin hierarchies of the human" (151).

In Part IV, "Afrofuturism and Africa," the authors variously consider representations of Africa in Afrodiasporic and African sf. Jerome Winter, for instance, examines Sofia Samatar's, Jemisin's, and Okorafor's work as part of a new generation of environmental Afrofuturists. Their focus on the bioregion of Africa not only celebrates African ecological practices that are based on "interrelatedness and kinship for all living organisms in the biosphere" (199), but it also offers important counter-narra-

tives to Western notions of environmental colonialism. Finally, Nedine Moonsamy discusses Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), an African fantasy novel written in English, arguing that his use of linguistic strategies which stretch the borders of experience is "universally crucial to SF" (227). Moonsamy further suggests that Tutuola's African fantasy is "domesticat[ing] the genre rather than deploying it as a vehicle for representations of estrangement and nonbelonging, as is the case with much Afrofuturist art" (223). She contends that, in contrast to (African American) Afrofuturism, "African SF involves seeing subjects as always already at home in the genre" (224). Explorations of "nonbelonging" might indeed be more typical of African American sf storytelling, as Moonsamy points out, but this does not mean that African American writers have not always already staked their own claims on the speculative as a genre and challenged essentialist notions of "home" through their literary imagination. Lavender's monograph *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (2019), in fact, defines the tradition of Afrofuturism as one that has been at home in American literature as long as science fiction itself.[2]

Lavender and Yaszek's collection offers an exciting intervention in contemporary conversations about Afrofuturism as a literary aesthetic. It does not probe some of the questions raised in relation to Afrofuturism as a global literary aesthetic, but this might well be the material for a future book. All essays showcase the value of studying the relationship between Black speculative literatures, futuristic imaginaries, and social justice within the framework of an Afrofuturist critical practice, and some exemplify how such investigations can be brought into meaningful dialogue with other fields of study, such as environmental sf scholarship and ecocriticism. The accessible writing along with the diversity of topics and texts makes this collection interesting for a wide range of scholars and non-specialists.

Notes

1 See, for example, Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

2 Isiah Lavender III, *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2019).

Trans/Intifada: The Politics and Poetics of Intersectional Resistance. By Denijal Jegić (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019), 329pp.

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Based on the author's dissertation, Denijal Jegić's book examines the current political situation surrounding the Nakba, the ongoing Palestinian exodus prompted by

the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. The book is divided into five chapters: "Palestinicide(s)—A Contemporary History of Zionism and the Nakba," "Palestine in U.S.-Israeli Similes," "Black-Palestinian Solidarity," "Arts as Resistance," and "Literary Analysis." In the introduction and in greater detail in the chapters, Jegić summarizes interpretations of the Palestinian conflict by theorists such as Edward Said and Judith Butler (7; see also 56, 211, 279, 295, 320). He examines the various forms of "palestinicides" (defined as "forceful removal of anything Palestinian"), such as the construction of illegal settlements, house demolitions, evictions, mass incarceration, "politicide, memoricide, ethnic cleansing, and, as scholars have argued, genocide," arguing that Israel's discursive hegemony has rhetorically altered Palestinian reality, "translating a diverse history into Islamophobic fantasies that target both Christian and Muslim Palestinians in particular, and Middle Eastern populations in general" (275). Jegić draws a close connection between the "Israelization of U.S. domestic and foreign policy" and Zionist values, seeing both Israel and the United States as settler-colonial states. He points to the dominance of Ashkenazi Jews both in Israel and the U.S., and the consequent subjugation of non-Ashkenazi Jews and other minorities (276).

Overall, Jegić offers a comparative cultural history of intersectional Palestinian and African American resistance. He explores political, cultural, and literary aspects of transnational resistance that have been articulated by Palestinian and Black American artists and activists. He depicts the Nakba as a recurring colonial event, reinforced by oppressive policies that have subjected Palestinians to the nexus of U.S. and Israeli hegemony. Black and Palestinian expressions of mutual solidarity result from the location of their struggles within subaltern spaces. Drawing on approaches from Black feminism and post-colonial theory, Jegić investigates written and spoken poetry, essays, and lyrics as revolutionary interventions into imperialist and colonialist currents and aimed at undermining colonialism and imperialism in their many forms beyond the original Palestinian context. Here, poetry has played a key role. It has helped construct a different notion of home and reclaim the Palestinian living room as a human space, countering the U.S.–Israeli military rhetoric that has for decades propagated the view of Palestinian homes as missile factories (277). In his close reading of poetic works by Caribbean-American June Millicent Jordan (1936–2002), American Suheir Hammad (b. 1973), Jegić also traces the influence of the famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) on Hammad (in "Poetic Resistance: A Literary History," 196–210, and "Literary Analysis", 211–73; see, in particular, 204, 214, 216).

While the somewhat cryptic title of the book is intriguing, the author could have been more precise in his terminology—for example, the meaning of "palestinicides"

and its function in the analysis remains unclear. Given the strong partisan stance, this study might have profited from more detailed historical analysis, focusing less on present politics and theory and more on the history leading up to the Nakba. The author assumes that political and cultural (including literary) history constitute the most important features of this complex problem. But perhaps this is precisely the main strength of Jegić's work: the way he condenses the discourse on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (including careful analyses of literary texts and Hebrew and Arabic etymology [e.g. 212]) and summarizes the ramifications in U.S. (African) American history in order to show at once the significance of the conflicts and limits of current interpretive models. By focusing on the cultural and political history of the present, Jegić contributes to our understanding of political conflicts, *Zeitgeschichte*, and contemporary literary (especially poetic) aesthetics. At the same time, the connection he draws between the Nakba and the "new Jim Crow," as epitomized in the "Gaza/Ferguson moment in 2014," is as plausible as it is disquieting, forcefully reminding us of the syncretic associations and recurring patterns in the history of settler-colonialism (166–70, 276). On a meta-level, Jegić's study reminds us of the dangers of overly schematic analyses in comparative cultural history that use binaries such as African Americans and Palestinians versus white U.S. Americans and Jewish Israelis. Jegić thus succeeds in drawing attention to fields in need of further research (one might also mention African American Judaism and Afro-Jewish syncretism and historical alliances in the U.S.) that also have to go beyond a social and cultural comparison to include their religious dimensions.

While the book is well-written, the author's penchant for enumerations interrupts the flow of the text, which is further hampered by the occasional typo (e.g. 277, 284). This does not take away, however, from the achievement of this wide-ranging study; namely, of highlighting the relevance of its topic to American cultural history and introducing the reader to important, lesser-known young poets. Jegić concludes that "Palestinians and Blacks have never seen any liberation. Instead, they experienced transformations in the realization of their structural oppression" (279). Thus Jegić extends Michelle Alexander's "New Jim Crow" to the Palestinian conflict, albeit with a somewhat simplistic perspective of victimization relying heavily on current media, which is driven by the humanitarian crisis arising from the structural nature of the conflicts. The larger stakes in his argument become clear when one considers that he regards recent political developments in the "Euro-American" West as the transnationalization of methods of "ethnocracy" developed by Israel, observing a "confluence of the Orientalist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and evangelical extremist currents of Zionism" (281–84).

In addition to a substantial bibliography (287–329), an index would have made the contents of this study more accessible, especially in light of its specialist and the-

oretical vocabulary. Despite my minor critique, Jegić offers a valuable introduction and many insights into the parallels between African American and Palestinian resistance.

Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity. By Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 220pp.

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In *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (2019), Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes offer a powerful assessment of the mutability and shifting deployment of race in contemporary American political rhetoric and cultural discourse. HoSang and Lowndes focus on the post-2016 American political landscape that was defined by the election of President Donald Trump and the (re)emergence of the alt-right, exploring the shifting salience, representation, and transposition of race within the context of a series of cultural and historical dichotomies. These dichotomies include autonomy and dependency, producer and parasite, virtue and vice, individual and collective, fitness and weakness, and are distilled into the representational figures of the producer, the patriot, and the parasite (12).

This framework functions to reveal how "race can travel across place and time" rapidly accruing new meanings and functions (13). HoSang and Lowndes bracket this new political and cultural period the "New Gilded Age," defined by contemporary forms of inequality affecting displaced whites as well as communities of color against the backdrop of the privatization of governmental services, economic deregulation, and an increased elite concentration of political power (4).

To frame these evolving structural conditions and emerging expressions and usages of race, HoSang and Lowndes filter a sharp economic critique through the work of Stuart Hall and of Black Marxism, connecting racialization and capitalization as fundamentally imbricated processes.[1] As such, HoSang and Lowndes's text, while examining a series of cultural and media texts including cartoons, videos, political sketches, political movements, and figures, positions itself differently than a purely cultural analysis of the changing lexicon of race and whiteness in a neoliberal age. Rather, the authors seek to analyze the shifting deployment of race as a cultural signifier within a new historical context whereby economic experiences of dispossession and marginalization are increasingly both destabilizing and reifying the color line.

Chapter 1 begins by examining the increase of anti-statist discourse on the right that is mediated through the parasite/producer dichotomy. The figure of the producer is defined by the "political intersections of whiteness, masculinity, and labor" (25). HoSang and Lowndes trace this mythologized relationship between white producers and racialized dependents or parasites to contemporary political conflicts in the "New Gilded Age." Today, the battle between producers and patriots has manifested as conflict between supposedly parasitic unionized public sector employees and an overly taxed-burdened public.

By examining cultural texts, particularly political cartoons, HoSang and Lowndes emphasize the elasticity of race as a language used by the right. White workers, including teachers, fire fighters, and nurses within the public sector, became implicated within a particular racial imaginary of parasitic threat juxtaposed against a white "producerist public" despite their own white racial identification (38). HoSang and Lowndes emphasize both the essential and elastic function of race in the contemporary political moment; race both engenders a certain discursive logic while also becoming superfluous as white public sector employees increasingly find that whiteness as a racial currency is insufficient in an age of governmental downsizing and neoliberal conservative politics (38).

Moving from this targeted discussion of white public sector workers, Chapter 2 discusses the emergence of the white precariat. Returning to the theme of racial transmutation and social and political cultures, HoSang and Lowndes trace how the "culture of poverty" myth has been re-appropriated and applied to working-class whites living in increasing conditions of precarity in the American Midwest and Appalachia. Drawing on scholarship from the field of Critical Race Studies, they discuss the emergence of the white precariat within the context of Cheryl Harris' concept of the "settled expectations of whiteness," which calls back to W. E. B. Dubois's earlier articulation of the "psychological wages of whiteness."[2] Globalization and neoliberalization, however, have unsettled not simply the language and imagination of race, but also its material dividends.

Despite the intimate interconnections between capitalist structures and community decline, the new marginalization of the white working class has recently been explained by cultural and biological notions of inferiority that, harkening back to "culture of poverty" myths, profoundly pathologize and racialize conditions of poverty (50, 60). Critically then, HoSang and Lowndes stress the convergence in socio-economic conditions between a contemporary white working class and working-class communities of color, even as language and cultural texts used to discuss and visualize these changes have been defined by a growing rhetoric of racial polarization.

Chapters 3 and 4 tackle a more complex question for cultural scholars and his-

torians to explore—the incorporation and heightened visibility of Americans of color in conservative and far-right political movements. Chapter 3 focuses on a series of political campaigns and activities of conservative politicians and leaders of color including Senator Tim Scott, former Representative Mia Love, and Heritage Foundation President Kay Cole James. Here, HoSang and Lowndes examine these political figures as articulating a historically specific form of black uplift and self-help within a broader, more contemporary, and whiter conservative lexicon and worldview that "internalizes neoliberal logics and aspirations" privileging individualism and autonomy (85). Conversely, they suggest that the gradual incorporation of Black communities and of radical Black politics into American culture and governmental institutions since the Civil Rights Movement has allowed "symbols of Blackness [to] become increasingly unmoored from their radical and oppositional legacies" (78, 93).

Comparatively, Chapter 4 focuses more specifically on individuals of color who are involved in far-right rather than conservative movements, making a distinction between white nationalism and economic nationalism in the far-right space. HoSang and Lowndes focus on far-right activists of color including American-Samoan Tusitala "Tiny" Toese, black social media stars Lynnette Hardaway and Rochelle Richardson, or "Diamond" and "Silk" respectively, and an Asian-American provocateur who operates under the pseudonym "Uncle Chang." HoSang and Lowndes attempt to explore how, through ambiguous and mutable language, racialized civic and economic nationalism leaves open spaces for the incorporation of people of color into this particular political imaginary. The presence and elevation of far-right activists of color ultimately signals a crucial liminality and contradiction within far-right spaces, and within the more mainstream American political and cultural imagination. This is to say that the American alt-right and mainstream American conservativism share a fetishization and mythologization of whiteness while also celebrating color-blind concepts of democratic universalism and American exceptionalism (125).

HoSang and Lowndes conclude by discussing protests against federal control of rural lands by white ranchers in Oregon at the Malheru National Wildlife Refuge. The chapter acts as a coda, bringing together discussion and analysis of discrete yet interconnected issues; globalization and far-right populism that both reflect and inaugurate new forms of racialization and economic inequality. HoSang and Lowndes connect local and state disinvestment in Oregon to a larger and more extensive hollowing out of the welfare state that first targeted the nation's most vulnerable dependents: Americans of color in urban cities in the late twentieth century.

Producers, Parasites, Patriots is ultimately as much an investigation into the contradictions that animate the overlapping logics, myths, and figures of the far-right as it is a call to action, highlighting how distinct and disparate experiences of dispos-

session do not preclude the possibility and power of multi-racial political coalitions to combat inequality in the current age. It emphasizes the necessity of scholarship on race and inequality that does not focus myopically on cultural forms and expressions at the expense of detailed and nuanced structural economic analysis. HoSang and Lowndes illustrate how to accomplish an interdisciplinary analysis that is paired with strong structural critique.

In a rapidly changing American cultural and political environment more work like HoSang and Lowndes's text is required to fully explore the nuance of the far-right ecosystem as well as the convergences and divergences between the alt-right and traditional conservatism in content, expression, and medium of transmission. HoSang and Lowndes provide an excellent addition to the scholarly conversation on these alt-right movements, but more attention from academics and particularly cultural studies, historians, and media studies scholars is needed. In Chapter 4, HoSang and Lowndes expertly identify the connections between pick-up artist culture, online misogynists, men's rights groups, and the alt-right that unite in expressions of toxic masculinity and violence. Exploring the connections between misogyny, the alt-right, and gender performance is a fertile site for future research.

HoSang and Lowndes ultimately provide an intervention into the current discussion on the heightened visibility of the alt-right and the 2016 election that has been defined by a plethora of think-pieces, books, and treatises from conservative and progressive scholars and writers exploring these dynamics politically, sociologically, and culturally. What makes their book unique, however, is that their focus on the current populist resurgence in the United States is defined by structural analysis, connecting cultural texts, political movements and figures to longer genealogies of state formation and capitalization. *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* will be a critical text for cultural studies, American studies, and humanities scholars looking for interdisciplinary analysis of digital medias and the alt-right that attends to the salience of race in American history.

Notes

1 Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 305–345; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism and the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

2 Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1777; W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: A History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt and Brace Company, 1935), 700.