Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts

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The current issue is the fourth of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts (AJHA)*, **published by the** *Arts, Humanities and Education Division* **of ATINER.**

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
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- Submission of Paper: **13 May 2024**

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- Submission of Paper: **29 April 2024**

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- **Dr. William O'Meara**, Academic Member, ATINER & Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, James Madison University, USA.

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Applied Democracy in Light of the Five "Iso"s of Democracy[*]

By Assaf Meydani[±]

Athenian democracy, with its five criteria, expresses an understanding and internalization of its components and thus becomes virtue. Modern democracies should strive to maintain a long process based on education for substantive democracy, and those that only emphasize the formal aspect, express a partial application of democracy. In such a situation, damage to democracy occurs. We argue that democracy can be treated as a collection of practices in the polity area by analyzing the politics and strategies of defending democracy as well as human rights. To do so, it is suggested here to integrate the tools of social choice theory with a unique institutionalist perspective that looks at both formal and informal factors. This notion creates the need to develop effective strategies for defending democracy and human rights.

Introduction

In a world of postmodernism, pluralism and tension between values, it seems that everything is allowed and the boundaries to which we are accustomed are blurred. It is no wonder why 'fake news' discourse occupies a central place and 'TV reality' becomes a substitute for stories of heroism and myth. As a result, the protagonists of the hour are celebrities and bloggers whose talents are often expressed in sharing their private lives online and expressing their opinions on current affairs in a language special to them. The traditional press is undergoing an internet change and the world of cryptocurrencies is becoming the investment arena of a young and rebellious generation. Words like democracy, human rights, separation of powers, poverty, equality, go through a laundry list of definitions until it seems that human discourse is over-invested in the questions of who is the persona responsible for a phrase, how credible it is to the listener or how visual it is on social networks. The content of the phrase is not the scale, the shell is.

It may be an extreme, simplistic description, but the fact that it is prevalent in the international public discourse places it as a phenomenon that has been studied in the academic literature. Yet, at the time of writing this article, Russia has brutally invaded Ukrainian territory in blatant violation of international law, an invasion that sharpens the debate over the democratic idea as a leading value along with the ability to ensure the protection of human rights.

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The literature emphasizes the takeover of democracy by anti-democratic populism. In their book, "How Democracies Die", Levitsky and Ziblatt argue that democracies today are dead. However, this death does not happen in military coups in the dead of night, but in daylight and by leaders elected in free and democratic elections.[1]

Procedurally, the regime looks democratic, as it holds free elections and maintains the principle of majority, but it lacks the substantive aspects of democracy - the protection of human and civil rights, restrictions on the concentration of power and balances between the authorities and the protection of minorities.

There is diversity in terms of the case studies; such were done on Poland, Hungary, USA, Russia, Turkey, Israel, China, Singapore, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria and more. The studies are also diverse in terms of the political history of the countries, the electoral system, whether presidential or parliamentary, the degree to which the societies are divided with ethnic minorities or homogeneous and so on. The literature discusses many factors for stability and institutional change in democracy ranging from governments, bureaucracies, courts, institutions, weak laws, civil society organizations, parliamentary coalitions, culture, norms, education, and leadership.[2]

Alleging this phenomenon, the author Prof. Gregory T. Papanikos did well when he chose to return to the depths of history while tracing ancient Athenian democracy and its components, and comparing it to what he calls modern democracy. Papanikos -in two of his articles ought to be read together: "The Bright Future of Democracy is in Education" (*Athens Journal of Education* 9(2): 353-364, 2022) as well as "The Five Ancient Criteria of Democracy: The Apotheosis of Equality" (*Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9(2): 105-120, 2022) - emphasizes the 'desired concept' of an ideal democracy as a philosophical discussion on the meaning of democracy, while criticizing the current reality of today's modern democracies. Papanikos assesses that "Democracy in ancient Athens was different from what is implemented today even in the most advanced democracies."[3]

Defining Democracy, Papanikos follows Pericles' Funeral Oration: "… and the name is called democracy because not the few but the many rule." Papanikos emphasizes that democracy exists only when all participate to direct (οἰκεῖν) the politeia.

1. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

2. Andreas Schedler, "Restraining the State: Conflicts and Agents of Accountability," in *The Self–Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies* (eds.) Larry Diamond Schedler and Marc F. Plattner, 333-350 (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1999); Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "The Quest for Good Government: Learning from Virtuous Circles," *Journal of Democracy* 27 (2016): 95-109; Larry Diamond, "Democracy's Arc: From Resurgent to Imperiled," *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 1 (2022): 163-179.

3. Gregory T. Papanikos, "The Five Ancient Criteria of Democracy: The Apotheosis of Equality," *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9, no. 2 (2022): 105.

The Five "Iso"s of Democracy

On the subject of democracy, the ancient Greek literature has identified five criteria of democracy of which Papanikos deals and then applies them to ancient Athens and modern advanced democracies.[4] All five criteria of democracy start with the word "iso-" which means "equal":

> **Isegoria** - In a democracy, isegoria means the right of every eligible citizen to speak freely and frankly only before a political body that matters, i.e., the ecclesia of demos, at a specified time and place, with a specific agenda and a well-determined audience (eligible citizens).
> **Isonomy** - Isonomy means that all citizens must be equal before the law.
> **Isoteleia** - Isoteleia requires that all citizens ought to contribute to public spending proportional to their income and wealth (property), but a politeia can find other revenue sources as well.
> **Isocracy** - Isocracy implies that every eligible citizen must have the same probability to be selected as an archon.
> **Isopoliteia** - deals with the notion on how to treat the other politeia. If they are treated equal, then this system of international relations can be called isopoliteia.

The author claims that democracy today satisfies some, but not all, of the five criteria. This was also true for the ancient (Athenian) democracy.[5] In his claims, the author marks the desired value direction as a measure to be strived for: "Democracy requires education and virtue, or to put it in one word, it requires pedagogy".[6]

As such, the Athenian democracy becomes a scale, a kind of virtue, that must be pursued for its fulfillment. In his two articles, the author does an excellent job of making the reader think and reflect on the essence of democracy, on the threats that lie at its doorstep, and on the ability to realize it. Moreover, these five criteria may serve as a benchmark for measuring and comparing modern democracies.

The author's reference to the five criteria is profound, emphasizing the process for democratic socialization as an essential part of democratic realization. The tension between the desired philosophical direction and the ability to exercise democracy in daily life is also characterized by the discussion in the literature dealing with the liberal-communitarian debate.

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Papanikos, "The Bright Future of Democracy is in Education," *Athens Journal of Education* 9, no. 2 (2022): 353.

The Liberal-Communitarian Debate:
Towards a Concept of Applied Democracy

In general, it can be said that liberalism, with an emphasis on individualistic anthology, is currently being challenged by communitarian ontology. It was Michael Sandel[7] who criticized the individualistic ontology that underlies John Rawls'[8] theory of justice and proposed it under a communitarian ontology. Other thinkers have criticized the individualistic ontology of liberalism, which has shown that liberalism is capable of relying on communitarian ontology.[9]

It was Charles Taylor[10] who wrote that when we are dealing with political theory, it is good that we ask two questions: What is the ontology that the theory assumes? And what are the policy recommendations of the theory? Indeed, the dilemma in everyday life is what happens when liberal practices are threatened by communitarian practices? What is the policy recommendation to be applied in these contexts?

Larry Diamond[11] argued that shallow democracy renders a country more susceptible to a total breakdown of the constitutional order, and that democratic regimes cannot become secure unless they broadly respect human rights and institutionalize constraints on the power of key political actors.

The literature on the implementation of human rights protection examines the complexity of everyday reality and attempts to trace the social processes underlying human behavior. To understand how policy regarding human rights can be implemented in a reality in which countries choose to enact human rights laws, but fail to protect human rights in practice, as well as implement public policy that violate human rights is what makes understanding true democracy so complex.

Jack Donnelly analyses the tension between natural rights, universal rights and community rights, and cultural relativism. He chooses to adopt the scale of

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7. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

8. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

9. Michael Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (1984): 315-330; Linda Barclay, "Autonomy and the Social Self," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (eds.) Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 52-71 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Will Kymlicka, "Community," in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (eds.) Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, 366-378 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

10. Charles Taylor, "Cross-purposes: The Liberal-communitarian Debate," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (ed.) Nancy Rosenblum, 159-182 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

11. Larry Diamond, "Democracy's Arc: From Resurgent to Imperiled," *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 1 (2022):

universal - natural rights, when the exercise of communitarian rights will be possible as long as the natural rights are not violated.[12]

A similar equation seems to be suggested by the author. Athenian democracy, with its five criteria, expresses an understanding and internalization of its components and thus becomes virtue. Modern democracies should strive to maintain a long process based on education for substantive democracy, and those that only emphasize the formal aspect, express a partial application of democracy. In such a situation, damage to democracy occurs, and democracy then has a duty to defend itself for the benefit of its citizens. The substantive view corresponds with the discussion on political culture—a concept that needs to be defined in order to test its realization. The author chooses to define the characteristics of democracy according to the five criteria as characteristics that more so serve as a definition. They express values that, in an educational process, become beliefs and preferences in terms of substantive democratic political culture. Take for example the first criterion: Isegoria.

In a democracy, isegoria means the right of every eligible citizen to speak freely and frankly only before a political body that matters. Freedom of expression is not generally meant here as a definition of the right granted in a system that is democratic. Following the Pericles discussion, the author emphasizes the word "Freely" and thus gives a deeper, inner meaning to the course of action. The internalization of the meaning of action gives democracy its special power. The internalization is also reflected in the listening side that actually listens. This substantive thinking corresponds with the perception of Jürgen Habermas' Public Sphere[13] as well as to the term "substantive democracy"

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12. Donnelly focuses on the political realism and cultural relativism which are challenging the international theories of human rights. Donnelly distinguishes between three different approaches to moral relativism. One such type is radical relativism, which considers culture, history and economy to be the source of all values. This approach contradicts the concept of human rights, since it maintains that there are no rights to which all people are entitled. The problem with this approach lies in the fact that we have shown that there are rights that every person possesses, simply by virtue of being human. On the other side of the argument lies the radical universal approach, which maintains that all values are universal, so that there is no room for any changes or adjustments based on a country's specific culture or history. The problem with this approach, which contradicts moral relativism, lies in the ability to apply the rights in each distinct country. There is also a middle-of-the-road approach which distinguishes between strong and weak relativism. According to strong relativism, values are determined, in principle, by the culture or circumstances, and the rights serve as a tool for the control of specific values. The focus is on types of values and relativism. Weak relativism turns the argument around, placing the emphasis on the rights as the main component and viewing the culture and circumstances as a tool of control. According to Donnelly, such an approach explains moral relativism in the clearest manner. Jack Donnelly, *International Human Rights* (New York: Westview, 1998).

13 . The public sphere is an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political

rather than "procedural democracy" [14] and to Samuel Huntington's definition of the term "civilization". [15] In all of them, the emphasis is on internalization, on the inner voice that directs the course of action.

Scale is undoubtedly important. The ability to internalize the values that underlie democracy is important. But what happens when, on a daily basis, reality provides events that express democratic violations; events that include threats to democracy as such. Threats stemming from many factors and complex interests of several political and social players in the political and social sphere, threats stemming from the powerful variability of players, or from the power attributed to a group of players that some call "elite".

It seems that one should stop for a moment and look inward at the formal and informal structural components of modern democratic systems —to the various players, to the interests, to the cultural conditions that shape beliefs and that shape preferences in the political and social arenas. It is necessary to diagnose the process by which a reality that encourages democracy or a reality that blocks democracy is determined, and trace the factors that explain it.

As the author points out, Plato's Ideal Politeia is superior, but when Plato himself had the opportunity to implement it, he ended up in prison. For this reason, it was not an ideal after all if it cannot be implemented.[16]

In a modern turbulent world, it is essential to emphasize the study of Applied Democracy. A study that will answer the question, why is there such a large gap between the declarations that countries make about democracy and human rights and their imperfect implementation of them? Or, why do states that have enacted laws about Democracy and human rights choose not to enforce these laws in daily life?[17]

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action. A "Public" is "of or concerning the people as a whole." Public Sphere is a place common to all, where ideas and information can be exchanged. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

14. As such, a minimalist model i.e., Procedural democracy, can only serve as a foundational opening, but the ultimate goal has to be building substantive democracy, based on what have evolved as fundamental principles of classical liberalism. Obviously, the institutional mechanisms and processes for achieving a minimalist model and progressing beyond it can vary from country to country, depending on the country's traditions and circumstances. Amin Saikal, "Democracy and Democratization," in *Encyclopedia Princetoniensis* (Princeton University).

15 . An advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

16. Papanikos, "The Bright Future of Democracy is in Education," 2022, 354.

17. Assaf Meydani, *The Israeli Supreme Court and the Human Rights Revolution, Courts as Agenda Setters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

In that respect, democracy can be treated as a collection of practices in the polity area by analyzing the politics and strategies of defending democracy as well as human rights. To do so, it is suggested here to integrate the tools of social choice theory with a unique institutionalist perspective that looks at both formal and informal factors.[18]

This notion creates the need to develop effective strategies for defending democracy and human rights. Ruth Gavison discusses two such strategies: the legal and the political. While the literature emphasizes a dual struggle between both the legal and political fronts in the international arena as well as the domestic arena, Gavison draws an important distinction between narrow and broader defenders of human rights who act via the legal or the political channel respectively. The narrow strategy of defending human rights via the legal channel may prove ineffective in cases where there is no public consensus regarding the importance of human rights.[19]

Democracy in the Process of Policy Making

The analysis suggested here is based on institutional theory and social choice[20] which aims to develop a theory that explains the political aspect of human rights and policies oriented in democratic values in general, as well as the functions of several players in the political arena; particularly politicians, bureaucrats, interest groups and the public.[21] These political players operate amid two structural variables.

The first is *non-governability* which is the inability of the political system to formulate and implement systematic policy plans. Non-governability arises in an environment with a sectarian electoral system that is restricted to a particular group and a traditional public management system that is not oriented towards

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18. See for example: Todd Landman, *Studying Human Rights* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

19. Ruth Gavison, "Human Rights," in *Human Rights and Civil Liberties In Israel – A Reader* (eds.) R. Gavison and H. Shneidor 1, 25-30 (Tel-Aviv: Frizer Communication Ltd (Hebrew), 1991); Michael W. McCann and H. Silverstein, "Rethinking Law's Allurements," in *Cause Layering: Political Commitments and Professional Responsibilities* (eds.) A. Sarat and S. Scheingold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

20. Itai Sened, *The Political Institution of Private Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

21. Michael Howlett, M. Ramesh and Anthony Perl, *Studying Public Policy, Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009); Philip Robins, "Public Policy Making in Turkey: Faltering Attempts to Generate a National Drugs Policy," *Policy & Politics* 37, no. 2 (2009): 289-306.

outcomes and/or efficiency.[22] Under these conditions of constant instability and uncertainty, players adopt strategies that will maximize their self-interests. One result is the harm done to human rights, even though, ironically, the main strategy utilized is intense litigation with the expectation that the International Court Justice – the ICJ which has its seat in The Hague - the principal judicial organ of the Unite Nations or the European Court of Human Rights, will provide policy decisions about human rights. Non-governmental organizations turn to the Court because it succeeded to promote the concept of HR more easily rather than the alternative of enacting laws within the parliaments as well as to implement those laws. The activity of non-governmental organizations is part of a global process that has been at work since the 1970s in which non-governmental organizations have been shaping human rights as a legal, political and social product.[23]

Indeed, Francis Fukuyama claimed that *good governance*—or at least initially decent, as opposed to predatory, governance—is key to democracy's long-term prospects.[24] Non-governability refers to the inability to make consistent and stable public policy—to design and implement quality public policies, goods and services.[25] It also leads to the entrenchment of traditional public management systems that are not oriented towards outcomes and efficiency through improved management of the public budget and do not focus on the role of public agencies in working with citizens.[26] Thus the result could reach economic and political instability.

The second characteristic is a *political culture* that serves short term calculation over the long term. In its extreme form, this culture gives rise to alternative politics, a semi-legal pattern of do-it-yourself behavior that favors outcomes over process.

These alleged variables enable us to explain the processes through which democracies are struggling to promote human rights within a specific institutional environment in general, thus determining the scope of human rights within the notion of substantive democracy in particular. From this twofold analysis we draw conclusions about the future of democracies and its attitude towards human rights.

Thus, we elaborate on the processes of social learning and their impact on the institutional setting. We also discuss the place and role of policy makers in defending human rights in light of cultural and structural variables. The politics

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22. Yehezkel Dror, *The Capacity to Govern: A Report to the Club of Rome* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

23. Gerald M. Steinberg, Anne Herzberg and Jordan Berman, *Best Practices for Human Rights and Humanitarian NGO Fact-Finding* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers / Brill, 2012).

24. Francis Fukuyama, "Why is Democracy Performing So Poorly?" *Journal of Democracy* 26 (2015): 11-20.

25. Gideon Doron and Michael Harris, *Public Policy and Electoral Reform: The Case of Israel* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 2000).

26. Itzhak Galnoor, *Public Management in Israel: Development, Structure, Functions and Reforms* (London: Routledge, 2011).

of defending human rights within a substantive notion of democracy is a complex realm consisting of several actors who are motivated by different means and interests. Thus, policy makers must consider the input of these actors if they want to determine a suitable policy.

An important branch of public choice theory is the study of institutions and constitutional arrangements within the discipline of new institutionalism. Understanding institutions as the rules of the game, this field studies the ways in which institutions evolve and their impact on political and economic outcomes. In many democracies, many of the processes are informal in the sense that special behavioral conduct becomes part of the reality without being formally institutionalized in the rules of the game.

For example, the expression of human rights in the constitution of a country is part of a wider issue concerning their relationship to other features of constitutionalism. Galligan and Sandler (2004) refer to constitutionalism as the recognition of and respect for the values of respect for persons, democracy, the rule of law, and related ideas within a country, and the existence of institutions and mechanisms for upholding them. Such a situation implies an institutional structure that reflects these values in a general way and provides mechanisms for their protection in particular cases.[27]

Analyzing the Reality for Modern Democracies and Human Rights

The protection of a substantive democracy and human rights is a product of the activity of several players: politicians, bureaucrats, non-governmental organizations and the general public. These groups act against the backdrop of structural as well as cultural conditions, both local and international. In his book, *The Third Wave*, Huntington demonstrates the crucial impact of the international context of prevailing norms, ideas, models, and trends, and how the policies and actions of powerful democracies—and their power *relative* to autocracies—shaped the global fate of democracy.[28] This hypothesis allows us to make comparisons between countries. In countries where the structural and cultural conditions are not outcome-directed, the viewpoint of the players will be long-term.

It is apparent that the meeting point between the state, which often represents the body that violates human rights, and the non-governmental organizations is not as contentious or challenging as one might expect. This identity between human rights NGOs and the state institutions is evident in the cooperation

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27. Dennis Galligan and Deborah Sandler, "Implementing Human Rights," in *Human Rights Brought Home: Socio-Legal Perspectives of Human Rights in the National Context* (eds.) Simon Halliday and Patrick Schmidt, 23-57 (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2004), 50.

28. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

between the organizations and certain politicians with liberal agendas. For these politicians, the promotion of human rights could be translated into electoral capital, maximizing these politicians' chances of re-election. In this context, sometimes results are emphasized over progress. Indeed, in an environment of non-governability characterized by the quick turnover of politicians in ministerial positions and the agendas they hold, organizations must move swiftly to realize their goals. The short window of opportunity works against the promotion of thoughtful, long-term goals. Such an environment also favors lobbying over more lengthy procedures that involve pilot projects, public hearings and education. Furthermore, non-governability results in the struggles of being transferred to the organizations and the courts. Therefore, lawyers at both the NGO level and the political and bureaucratic level spearhead initiatives. Even though representatives of human rights NGOs are interested in promoting long-term proposals, short-term considerations, namely, the maximizing of immediate results will shape their political perceptions and force them to narrow the scope of their proposals to ensure success.

Behaving in accordance with personal interests is a natural part of all human behavior.[29] A British parliamentary committee sums up this phenomenon as follows: "The essence of the problem…is that the balance of advantage between Parliament and Government in the day-to-day working of the Constitution is now weighted in favor of the government to a degree which arouses widespread anxiety and is inimical to the proper working of our parliamentary democracy."[30]

Nevertheless, public systems in the modern world, especially the new public management reforms recently adopted in many developing countries, are based on and seek to increase the checks and balances intended to prevent players from acting solely in their own interests. Indeed, in some cases they might even benefit from acting in the interests of the public.

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29 . Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis* (Boston. MA: Little, Brown, 1979).

30 . First report from the Select Committee on Procedure (1977-1978) HC 588 par. 1.5. quoted in Gavin Drewry, "Select Committees and Back-Bench Power," in *The Changing Constitution* (eds.) Jeffrey Jowell and Dawn Oliver, 136 (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985); and in *András Sajó*, *Limiting Government. An Introduction to Constitutionalism* (CEU Press, Central European University Press, 1999), 199.

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Iphigeneia Breathes: A Filmic Musing on the Winds, Breathing, Life, and the Imagination

By Andrea Eis[*]

Artistic inspiration drawn from scholarly and experiential research has led me to incorporate a personal approach to classical reception into my art films: in voiceovers and intertitles, I imagine new endings for ancient stories. Imagination becomes a powerfully direct element in my films, when combined with my own experience of Greece, and scholarly research into aspects of Greek myths, plays, and language. This paper traces the evolution of my approach in three of short art films: from an anonymous, but often subjective narrator, implying my authorship;[1] the clearly subjective perspective of the filmmaker inviting viewers to imagine;[2] to my most recent film, a combination of an omniscient, almost neutral narrator with a first-person narrator who also invites imagination.[3] While working on Iphigeneia Breathes, its breathing theme became unexpectedly entwined with contemporary events: George Floyd, saying he could not breathe, was murdered; the pandemic stole breath from millions of people; and gatherings of loud, close-packed, chanting crowds as precursors or loci of death became terrifying realities. My process, research, approach to reception and imagination ultimately brought personal and communal contemporary experience into interaction with ancient narrative.

Introduction

As an art filmmaker with an academic background in ancient Greek, a feminist mind-set, and a stubbornly optimistic view that we can still learn from both the wisdom and the mistakes of the ancient Greeks, my films incorporate my feminist reinterpretations of Greek plays and myths, re-visioned in contemporary images. My films surface from an amalgam of scholarly and experiential research. Core research underlying the development of my films includes studying Greek plays and myths, in translation and in ancient Greek, along with commentaries and criticism that explore them in depth. I focus on key elements in their narratives, focusing in particular on the depictions of female characters. Experientially, I engage my visual and aural senses with eternal aspects of Greek landscape and natural forms, and with the compelling power of ancient sites.

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1. A. Eis, *Penelope's Odyssey* (Toughened Glass Films, 2015).
2 Eis, *Perhaps* (Toughened Glass Films, 2017).
3 Eis, *Iphigeneia Breathes* (Toughened Glass Films, 2021).

Penelope's Odyssey:
A Subjective Narrator Emerges

Most of my films have been "at a remove"— the reinterpretation and re-visioning happens in the third person, my authorship concealed in the voices of the characters. In *Penelope's Odyssey* (2015), however, I began to imply my authorship. The film is divided into segments for different years culled from Penelope's long wait for Odysseus to return from the Trojan War. Intertitle sequences introduce the year segments with an anonymous but deliberately subjective narrator's commentary and quotes from Homer's *Odyssey* (Figures 1 and 2). Typefaces, fonts, and line alignments signal that the source of each intertitle is different: narrator's commentary, specific Homeric lines,[4] and a second commentary that restates, expands, or revises the Homeric quote.

Penelope makes plans to avoid
being forced into another marriage.

Her suitors will be no match for her

Day after day she sat,
weaving
Every torch lit night,
she let her work go.

Odyssey, 2:104-105

Unraveling every row
Reclaiming every day

Figure 1. *Intertitle Sequence for Year Five* in *Penelope's Odyssey*.[5]

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4. Translations for Homeric lines for the intertitles are by the author.
5. Eis, *Penelope's Odyssey*, 2015, 1:55-2:15.

Figure 2. *Penelope's Eyes, from Year Five, Penelope's Odyssey. Film still by Andrea Eis*

With two subsequent films, *Perhaps* (2017) and *Iphigeneia Breathes* (2021), I overtly declared my personal reception of the myths and plays: stating rather than implying that it was my perspective, that I was bringing my contemporary experience into interaction with ancient narratives, and imagining different endings. I drew the viewer into my point of view as the filmmaker, not only with visual direction, but also with my open invitations to the films' viewers to imagine along with me.

Perhaps and Clytemnestra: Experimenting with Perspective and Imagination

A Misnamed Tholos Tomb: Power and an Enigmatic Presence

The four-minute film *Perhaps* was an experimental precursor for two techniques that I later intensified in *Iphigeneia Breathes*: inserting my first-person filmmaker's perspective, and using imagination overtly as a spur to content. The catalysts for imagination in *Perhaps* came from an ongoing scholarly and artistic interest in the character of Clytemnestra (most specifically in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*), and from personal experience visiting the archaeological remains at Mycenae, particularly the largest tholos tomb, which is commonly known as the 'Treasury of Atreus,' or 'Tomb of Agamemnon.' Both of these names are widely considered to be incorrect attributions, but are still in common use.

Pausanias, writing in the 2nd century C.E., made a brief assertion about the existence of Agamemnon's grave at Mycenae, but he did not place it in the tholos tomb, which lies well outside the walls of Mycenae: "Agamemnon has his tomb [at Mycenae]…a place within [the wall], where lay Agamemnon himself and

those who were murdered with him."[6]

Heinrich Schliemann, in his description of the tholos tomb, called it 'Treasury of Atreus.' While noting that it is "commonly called in the Argolid the 'Tomb of Agamemnon,'"[7] Schliemann asserted that it was "[not] likely…that the sepulchre of Agamemnon was a monument of any great magnificence."[8] Contrary to popular belief, several sources assert that Heinrich Schliemann never specifically named any of the tombs he excavated at Mycenae as Agamemnon's, with one source repeating a purported Schliemann proclamation to that effect.[9]

The Ministry of Culture of Greece used 'Treasure of Atreus' along with 'so-called Tomb of Agamemnon' throughout its documentation for the site's World Heritage nomination,[10] and uses 'Treasure of Atreus' in its description of the tomb on its website.[11]

Regardless of attribution, the tholos tomb has a powerful physical presence, visually and emotionally. The architecture is impressive and awe-inspiring, with its size (the conical beehive shape of the tomb is 14.50 m in diameter at the base, 13.20 m high) and quality of the stonework.

I savored quiet time in the reverberant space, having been there several times when no other people were in the tholos. The interior of the tholos can seem enigmatic, impassive, almost serene (Figure 3). I filmed without knowing exactly how I would use the footage, or what story I would tell. Eventually in *Perhaps,* I chose to identify the tholos as Agamemnon's tomb, as it produced useful reverberations in connection with Clytemnestra. My voiceover does acknowledge that archaeologists say this is not Agamemnon's tomb.

Over many years, I have created an archive of footage, which I 'rediscovered' as I edited. I also revisited my archive of photographs of the tholos tomb. An image showing the rough, uneven floor (Figure 4), eventually became a catalyst in my rethinking of Clytemnestra's story.

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6. Pausanias, *Description of Greece (*Harvard University Press, 1918), 2.16.6-7.

7. H. Schliemann, *Mycenae: A Narrative of Researches and Discoveries at Mycenae and Tiryns (*John Murray, 1878), 49.

8. Ibid, 48.

9. See G. Grazadio, and E. Pezzi, "Schliemann and the So-called 'Agamemnon's Mask," *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolicio* 48 (2006): 113-131, for discussion of this, and of the importance of a passage in *Schliemann of Troy*: *Story of a Goldseeker*: "Schliemann's reply to a contemporary scholar is reported there. The scholar had criticized him for the claim to have discovered Agamemnon's corpse. Schliemann retorted that he himself never maintained to have found Agamemnon's tomb." E. Ludwig, *Schliemann of Troy: The Story of a Goldseeker* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 119-120.

10. Ministry of Culture, Greece, Nomination of Ancient Mycenae for Inclusion on the World Heritage List, 1998, *Unesco World Heritage Nomination Documentation 941*. (1999).

11. O. Psychogiou, *Treasure of Atreus: Description* (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2012)*.*

Figure 3. *Tomb of Agamemnon/Treasury of Atreus. Photograph by Andrea Eis*
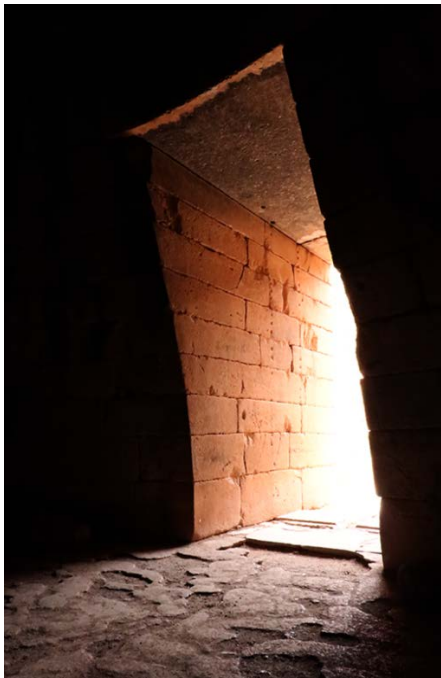
Figure 4. *Looking Towards the Door of the Tholos, Showing the Surface of the Floor. Photograph by Andrea Eis*

Descriptions of the tomb rarely mention the floor, which is easy to overlook, considering the intense presence emanating from the rest of the tholos. Earth and debris had been cleared from the dromos and chamber by Panayotis Stamatakes

in 1878.[12] It is highly unlikely, of course, that the current surface of the floor looks as it did Mycenaean times. To me, however, the floor's pitted, rough surface was a compelling stimulant for my imagination, once I started imagining how Clytemnestra might put this space to use.

I also photographed the small side chamber, that had possibly been used for rituals or burials. Schliemann described the inner condition of this small space:

> In this chamber is an accumulation of rubbish, from 3 ½ feet to 4 feet deep, mostly consisting of the detritus of bats' dung. By means of the two trenches, which I dug three years ago in this chamber, I found in the centre a circular depression, in the form of a large washbowl…Near this I found some large wrought calcareous stones, which seem to indicate some monument once existed in this chamber, for otherwise their presence is inexplicable.[13]

Visitors are unable to judge for themselves, as they are not allowed to enter this chamber, increasing the mystery. A sign at the side chamber's entrance used to warn, in Greek and English, to "Keep Out. Danger" (Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Entrance to the Side Chamber, Undated. Photograph by Andrea Eis*

In 2022, a new sign warned "No Entry," and a dog guarded against entrance, though it seemed more interested in sleeping (Figure 6). Wisely, no one dared to challenge its ability to fulfill a guard's role.

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12. A. J. B. Wace, "The Date of the Treasury of Atreus," *Journal of Hellenic Studies,* 46, no. 1 (1926): 111.

13. Schliemann, *Mycenae: A Narrative of Researches and Discoveries at Mycenae and Tiryns*, 1878, 45.

Figure 6. *Entrance to the Side Chamber, 2022. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

In the *Prologue*, a first-person commentary in voiceover, expresses what I thought Clytemnestra might have planned for Agamemnon's return. I begin my conversational voiceover musing about what it would mean if this was Agamemnon's tomb. His expected burial place would have been a powerful source of interest to Clytemnestra over many years, as she plotted her revenge on the man who had sacrificed their daughter. I focused on simple words, basic actions, using tone of voice to suggest Clytemnestra's malevolent enthusiasm and dramatic intensity.

> *Archaeologists have determined that this is not the tomb of Agamemnon.*
> *I understand that.*
> *It's not that I don't get it.*
>
> *But can't you just see Clytemnestra there?*
> *Can't you just imagine her*
> *having them clear the dirt from the path,*
> *having them pull open those doors,*
> *having them push aside the previous king—*
> *who was powerful, as powerful as Agamemnon—*
> *but just a man, and so he died.*
> *She would have had him pushed aside,*
> *and have the floor swept,*
> *and made ready for Agamemnon.*[14]

A point-of-view (POV) shot (Figure 7) circles the curved inner wall of this tholos tomb that is not Agamemnon's. I invite the viewer to imagine Clytemnestra there, if this *had* been a tomb to be used for Agamemnon. Using techniques that

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14. Eis, *Perhaps*, 2017, 0:37-1:14.

are repeated throughout the film, the movement of the hand-held camera is unsteady, the image grainy and raw. As with many of the shots in the film, a large black border surrounds the small clip, suggestive of Clytemnestra blocking out much of the world, as she focuses in on what is important to her.

Figure 7. *The POV Walk inside the Tholos. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

The voiceover here, and at other times throughout the film, includes sections of doubled tracks of alternative readings, set slightly off sync from each other, like warped echoes. The slight differences in the wording of these versions suggests that the past is an unstable reference—even more so in the service of the imagination.

Constructing Clytemnestra's Character

To pair with experiential knowledge, I researched Clytemnestra in more depth. I developed the rest of the script while re-reading Aeschylus's *Agamemnon.* Clytemnestra's actions are almost as hard to accept as Agamemnon's. Despite that, I found myself drawn to this flawed woman as Aeschylus portrayed her: a strong woman, who ruled in a world dominated by men.

For a play named *Agamemnon,* the titular character has ironically few lines: only about seventy that he speaks directly, and a short passage in which he is quoted by the Chorus—all this in a play that runs over 1,600 lines in total. Clytemnestra is the core of the play, a character who acts forcefully and unapologetically. Aeschylus created a Clytemnestra with a wildly vengeful heart. She was constant in her grief, and consistent in her determination to punish Agamemnon.

She wields her power over Agamemnon in words and deeds, in ways that

are caustic, shrewd, dismissive, calculating, evil, and to her, justified and incredibly satisfying. Repeatedly, Aeschylus has characters point out (in ancient Greek terms) Clytemnestra's 'male' traits, and Clytemnestra claims them for herself as well. She will not give in to the Chorus, or to Agamemnon, or to the audience's emotions. Her strength is there in Aeschylus's play in the Greek, regardless of what translation is referenced. We hear her assert her will, her determined push against men's scorn of and power over women. She spars verbally with men, expressing her intelligence, cleverness, and sardonic wit. The play's audience is pushed between sympathy (her grief and Agamemnon's responsibility are made clear) and horror.

Before Agamemnon appears, Clytemnestra tells the Chorus of his return, but they do not believe her. A verbal match ensues between her and the Leader of the Chorus, who ridicules her, saying she has been visited by a phantom spirit, or is believing rumors to be truth. Clytemnestra details the series of beacons she had devised to signal Agamemnon's return, and finishes with a convincing flourish:

> Clytemnestra   *And here*
> *You have it, what a woman has to say.*
> *Let the best win out, clear to see.*
> *A small desire but all that I could want.*
>
> Leader
> *Spoken like a man, my lady, loyal,*
> *Full of self-command. I've heard your sign*
> *and now your vision.*[15]

When Agamemnon does appear, Clytemnestra bends him to her will, insisting that he walk into the palace on luxurious purple tapestries. In the Fagles translation, you can palpably sense the scorn, false praise, and sarcasm underlying Clytemnestra's words, and the confusion, frustration, and begrudging acceptance in Agamemnon's.

> Agamemnon   *And where's the woman in all this lust for glory?*
> Clytemnestra   *But the great victor—it becomes him to give way.*
> Agamemnon   *Victory in this…war of ours, it means so much to you?*
> Clytemnestra   *Oh give way! The power is yours if you surrender,*
>   *All of your own free will, to me!*
> Agamemnon   *Enough!*
>   *If you are so determined—*[16]

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15. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (Penguin Books, 1997), 351-357. I chose the Fagles translation here, as his style best fits my eventual construction of Clytemnestra's character.
16. Ibid, 935-940.

Reimagining an Earthquake Changes Everything

The geological history of Mycenae seems to show that earthquakes in the late 13th century B.C.E., caused destruction at the Mycenaean palace. The back wall of the megaron, where the throne would have been placed, crumbled and fell into the Chavos Ravine below. Walls have been partially reconstructed at Mycenae to delineate the rooms of the palace, but a throne is not part of the reconstruction. Column bases and remains of a circular hearth are still visible (Figure 8) though they are currently covered with a protective structure

Figure 8. *The Megaron at Mycenae, Looking Towards the Presumed Location of the Throne against the Back Wall. Photograph by Andrea Eis*

During a geological survey at Mycenae in 2014, a large worked stone fragment was discovered in the ravine that runs southwest from below the megaron's location, in the dry river bed of the Chavos River. An archaeologist has described the fragment as a portion of the seat of the Mycenaean throne,[17] though that attribution has been disputed.[18]

I knew about the destruction of the back wall of the megaron when working on *Perhaps*, but not about this archaeological find. An actual throne was not necessary for inspiration. For me, the archaeologically and personally disappointing emptiness that I saw in place of that throne spurred another encounter with Clytemnestra for my film.

17. C. Maggidis, and N. Lianos, "Mycenae–2014 Report," *Journal of Hellenic Studies: Archaeological Reports* (2014).

18. "Stone Fragment May Be Piece of Mycenean Throne,"in *Archaeology*, June 17, 2016. https://www.archaeology.org/news/4582-160617-greece-mycenaean-throne. This website of the Archaeological Institute of America, has a 2016 news story that includes a terse statement in opposition to Maggidis' claim that it was part of a throne: "The Greek Ministry of Culture agrees with a study suggesting that the artifact was part of a stone basin."

I began imagining a different story. The central section of the film uses an omniscient narrator to present Clytemnestra's thoughts and feeling, in a doubled voiceover soundtrack with an imprecise echo, as she conjures him up. She knew he would be more interested in coming home to his kingdom, to his power, to his throne in the megaron, than to her. His re-occupation of the throne is a given, except to Clytemnestra.

> *Until [Agamemnon's return], though, this room belonged to her. She had held the power at Mycenae for far too long,*
> *to simply turn it back over to the man*
> *who had so easily served up their daughter to the gods.*[19]

POV images in this section suggest Clytemnestra pacing around Mycenae, peering from behind or over walls looking towards the megaron, a neck-twisting look up at the Lion Gate (Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9. *POV Shot Peering Around a Wall Towards the Megaron. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

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19. Eis, *Perhaps*, 2017, 2:19-2:38.

Figure 10. *POV Shot Looking up at the Lion Gate. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

My new version would find a way for Clytemnestra, fueled by her inexorable desire for revenge, to unexpectedly seal Agamemnon's fate well before he returned, without actually murdering him herself. According to Aeschylus, Clytemnestra lured Agamemnon into the bath, tangled him in a net and stabbed him to death, in a violent off-stage scene that she later describes in detail to the Chorus, with exultant pleasure, as she displays the bodies of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra:

Clytemnestra   *So he goes down, and the life is bursting out of him—*
                 great sprays of blood, and the murderous shower
                 wounds me, dyes me black and I, I revel
                 like the Earth when the spring rains come down,
                 the blessed gifts of the god, and the new green spear
                 splits the sheath and rips to birth in glory![20]

While she had proudly admitted to killing Agamemnon (*Here I stand and here I struck…I did it all.*[21]) she also complains to the Chorus that they should have been the ones to hold Agamemnon responsible for Iphigeneia's death:

Clytemnestra   *Didn't the law demand you banish him?—*
                 hunt him from the land for all his guilt?"[22]

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20. Aeschylus, 1410-1415. For this passage, the 1926 translation by H. W. Smyth is even more graphic: "Fallen thus, he gasped away his life, and as he breathed forth quick spurts of blood, he struck me down with dark drops of gory dew." 1389-1390.

21. Aeschylus, 1398-1400.

22. Aeschylus, 1445-1446.

To narrate a different version, less bloody but still fatal for Agamemnon, I used my knowledge about the crumbled palace wall to allow Clytemnestra's vengeance to take another path, but first with a detour into film theory.

In 1975, Laura Mulvey, published an essay that became highly influential in film theory, delineating the power and purpose of the male gaze in film:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure.[23]

While this dichotomous approach, along with various other aspects of Mulvey's theory, have been augmented or shifted in the years since that essay,[24] the idea of the male gaze was still useful to me.

The shots that accompany the final voiceover in the film represent Clytemnestra projecting her fantasy, as she stares at the symbols of Agamemnon and his power— the megaron and throne. The POV shots are harsh, grainy, a stare through tall weeds, blowing wildly in the wind. Behind them is a seemingly indestructible Mycenaean wall. Eventually weeds take over the frame before a fade to black (Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 11. *POV Shot at Past Weeds at the Wall. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

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23. L. Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinemas, Feminist Film Theory (*Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 62-63.

24. See, for example, C. Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock and Mulvey," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (2007): 83-108, in particular pp. 83-84.

Figure 12. *POV Shot of Weeds Filling the Frame. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

The voiceover shifts between the original first-person filmmaker's perspective, about archaeological details and imagining Clytemnestra's thoughts, to Clytemnestra herself.

> *The south side of the megaron—where archaeologists think*
> *Agamemnon's throne had stood—it all crumbled, fell into the ravine.*
> *The stone seat, the beaten earth floor, that whole side of the megaron.*
>
> *Perhaps Clytemnestra knew that her stare,*
> *after so many years of waiting,*
> *had loosened the supporting wall.*
> *Perhaps Clytemnestra knew that, if she waited,*
> *her act would prove unnecessary.*
>
> *She stared at that mountain, beyond that room,*
> *listening for the rumble of the collapse.*[25]

My journey had eventually led me to absorb archaeological knowledge, archaeologists' suppositions, the power of place, a playwright's approach to character (as well as a translator's approach), and film theory into my imagination, to give Clytemnestra an alternative.

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25. Eis, *Perhaps*, 2017.

Iphigeneia Breathes:
Experience and Research

My next film also developed out of weaving together many strands into imagining an alternative to an ancient Greek woman's fate: new knowledge (*on pronunciation and breathing)*, experiencing nature (*the physical palimpsests of Greece)*, Greek words and their meanings (*linguistic and textual research: winds)*; nature sounds (*cicada songs: life, death, abundance, and insistence)*, and the body, voice, and story (*embodiment: the fusion of speech and physical action*).

On Pronunciation and Breathing

Iphigeneia Breathes, which I completed at the end of 2021, narrates aspects of Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (405 B.C.E.), but as with *Perhaps*, I turned the ancient story in a different direction. Inspired by unexpected new knowledge—learning the modern Greek pronunciation of Iphigeneia's name—I imagined an alternate ending to Iphigeneia's story. The film intertwines the human voice, human breathing, and the winds.

In 2019, I accompanied theatre and filmmaking students from Oakland University on a study abroad trip to Greece. Over several weeks, they rehearsed an adaptation of Euripides' *Orestes*, for a performance in a small outdoor amphitheatre on the island of Hydra (Figure 13). The director, Karen Sheridan, who had written the adaptation of *Orestes*[26] that the students performed, asked a Greek actor, Stathis Grapsas, to train the students in the modern Greek pronunciation of the ancient Greek names in the play. Most of their audience would be Greek, and would themselves know and use the modern Greek pronunciations.

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26. K. Sheridan, *Orestes* (Unpublished Play Script, 2019).

Figure 13. *PR photo for Orestes. Left to right: Oakland University (Michigan) Students Dryden Zurawski, Connor Rajan, and Mariah Colby. Hydrama Theatre and Arts Centre, Hydra, Greece, June 2019. Photograph by Andrea Eis*

My own experiences with the pronunciation of Greek names became essential to *Iphigeneia Breathes*, and led me to consider inserting my first-person voiceover into the structure. When I was a classics major in undergraduate school, I had learned to say Iphigeneia with a tight, hard pronunciation: *If-i-je-NI-a*.[27] After noting that in the voiceover, I explored it in the context of breathing:

I can breathe out before saying it, empty my lungs,
And still get her name said.
If-i-je-NI-a.[28]

From Grapsas, I learned that in the modern Greek pronunciation, her name is soft and lyrical: *if-ee-YEN-yah*.

*To say her name in modern Greek, I **have** to breathe.*
If-ee-YEN-yah.

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27. Phonetic spelling taken from a pronunciation guide in Euripides, *Orestes* (J. Harrison & H. Eckhart, 2012), 110.

28. Eis, *Iphigeneia Breathes*, 2021.

It is a lyrical name, a musical name.
If-ee-YEN-yah.
A soft exhalation, gliding forward.[29]

The fact that breathing is required to say Iphigeneia's name helped me rethink the path of my film, but I did not sort out how that could change Iphigeneia's story until months later. During that time, I explored the physical palimpsests of Greece, researched Greek words for wind, and delved into stories of the cicadas, while experiencing the relentlessness of their songs as a soundtrack to Greek summers.

Physical Palimpsests of Greece

I have spent a great deal of time in Greece over many years, in cities, at archaeological sites, in rural areas, and on islands. Being in Greece can be like a living in a palimpsest—there are always traces of the past that the present seeks to obliterate, and the past is continually reused for a new purpose in the present.

While the physicality of ancient ruins has activated much of my interest, I have also become engrossed with the way that elements of nature can connect me to Greece's ancient past. The natural world of Greece makes up nearly all of the images in *Iphigeneia Breathes*: the constant yet varied flow of the sea; the fluttering, stilled, and dying flowers; the visual impact of the winds on trees; the intense cicada songs.

The myths of the past inhabit the same place as we do, as do the mountains. Natural elements appear or sound the same as they did in ancient Greece. This film does not have a traditional script or dialogue, so these natural elements serve as objective correlatives suggesting thoughts, emotions, and ideas.

Linguistic and Textual Research: Winds

Linguistic and textual research was also significant to the imagery, construction, and meaning of *Iphigeneia Breathes*. As with *Perhaps*, I read multiple translations of Greek plays and epics, and also made my own translations of a few key passages. I delved into detailed analyses of Greek words that seemed to relate to my ideas; and conversely, I also used the study of specific Greek words to generate ideas. In *Iphigeneia Breathes,* the research at times forms only a latent subtext; at other times it serves as a central element in the meaning of the film.

Experiencing the strong presence of the winds on Greek mountains and islands made 'wind' a generative stimulus. I had long known the story, of the warriors headed for Troy being stalled at Aulis, due to variously explained issues,

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29. Eis, *Iphigeneia Breathes*, 2021.

such as the absence of wind or too much wind.[30] Researching various Greek words for wind, I found that there were ten Homeric words for various kinds of winds, from breezes to blasts:

> The semantic range of Homeric wind is broad, ranging from the most neutral and pervasive term, ἄνεμος (wind), to πνοιή (breath, breeze, blast), αὔρη (breeze), οὖρος (favorable wind for sailing), ἀϋτμή/ἀϋτμήν (breath of wind), ῥιπή (rush of wind), ἀήτης (blast), ἀέλλη (whirling or stormy wind), θύελλα (rushing stormwind), λαῖλαψ (storm).[31]

In *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, Agamemnon uses the 'neutral' ἄνεμος when he speaks of lack of winds at Aulis:

Agamemnon	*The birds are still at any rate,*
	and the sea is calm, hushed are the winds
	and silence broods over Euripus.[32]

A discovery central to *Iphigeneia Breathes* was the myriad uses for πνεῦμα (pneuma), another word for wind that I had looked up in a hefty copy of an unabridged version of the Liddell and Scott Greek Lexicon. The word πνεῦμα was used not only for wind, but also for breathing, life, breath, spirit, the air we breathe.[33] This poetic concatenation of meanings, and the linguistic fusion of human qualities with the power of nature, eventually filtered into my film, sometimes foregrounded, and sometimes buried within it.

Cicada Songs: Life, Death, Abundance, and Insistence

Cicadas had become a fascinating aural presence for me in Greece, and I recorded cicada songs on several trips to Greece. In Plato's *Phaedrus* Socrates speaks of "the charm of their Siren voices"[34], an opinion not held by many who currently experience cicadas, but one that was intriguingly close to my own experience.

The origin myth for the cicadas (their name in ancient Greek is the onomatopoetic τέττιξ – tettix) was that cicadas were originally men who were so

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30. A. C. Purves, "Wind and Time in Homeric Epic," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140, no. 2 (2010): 328 and footnote 12.

31. Ibid, 326, footnote 7.

32. Euripides, "Iphigenia in Aulis," in *The Plays of Euripides,* Vol II (George Bell and Sons, 1891), 9-11.

33. H. G. Liddell, and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon Based on the German Work of Francis Passow, with Corrections and Additions by Henry Drisler* (Harper & Bros, 1849), 1198.

34. Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9* (Harvard University Press, 1925), 259.

enthralled with the singing of the Muses that they forgot to eat or drink, and so they died. The Muses, in turn, brought these men back as cicadas, to enthrall (or annoy) the men still living.

The cicadas' mythic cycles of life and death hint at the life and death stories in *Iphigeneia Breathes*. I used cicada song in opposing patterns in the film, loudly present when the voiceover spoke of silence; completely absent when the voiceover spoke of the abundant, insistent presence of their songs. Their natural music also alternated with the composed musical soundtrack of the film.[35]

Embodiment: The Fusion of Speech and Physical Action

Human speech is always embodied, in the literal sense that the work of the body is necessary to make speech heard; the written word is similarly embodied in the physical actions needed to create letters and words. The power that language has over physical actions, as well as the cascading results of those actions, are abundant in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis.* Calchas' prophecy spurs Agamemnon's duplicitous letter to Clytemnestra, telling her to bring their daughter Iphigeneia to Aulis to marry Achilles, when she actually is to be sacrificed. Iphigeneia pleads with her father for her life, then voices her agreement to be sacrificed.

Human speech is essential to *Iphigeneia Breathes*, and not only because both pronunciations of Iphigeneia's name are explained and used in the film. Saying Iphigeneia's name in modern Greek is what shifts human speech into a literally embodied force of change in the film. It is the breathing required by her name that eventually spurred me to change her story.

The Arc from *Iphigeneia at Aulis* to *Iphigeneia Breathes*

Returning to the Voice of the Filmmaker

As I worked on editing my Iphigeneia film, I began rethinking my original film script, based so heavily in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*. Did I really want to just retell the narrative of *Iphigeneia at Aulis* as it was? Did I have another opportunity for imagining something else? Ultimately, I conceived a structure alternating contemporary and ancient storytelling. An anonymous narrator gives a highly condensed and biased version of *Iphigeneia at Aulis*; my first-person filmmaker's commentary is at first experiential, then imaginative. I eventually formed my film by intertwining past and present with the winds, human breathing, life, the natural world, and the Greek language, ancient and modern.

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35. The music for *Iphigeneia Breathes* was composed and performed by Terry Herald.

The film's interlaced structure and content reflect the serpentine path of scholarly and experiential research that led me to imagine a new ending. As the imagined possibility surfaces in the film, I make that possibility 'happen.'

Telling the Story: Structure and Content

The film opens with a pan over a Greek and English text of *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (Figure 14) to set the context. A short prologue follows, fading in on the various words that πνεῦμα can express, setting up the pattern of variations throughout the film. A first-person voiceover narrates island experience—the blowing and stilling of winds, the silence and cicadas. Imagery and audio are in opposition (such as trees blowing in the wind while the voiceover talks about the winds being stilled). The oppositions that occur throughout the film imply the fluidity of perception, and a questioning of knowledge and experience, which ultimately opens an aperture for imagination.
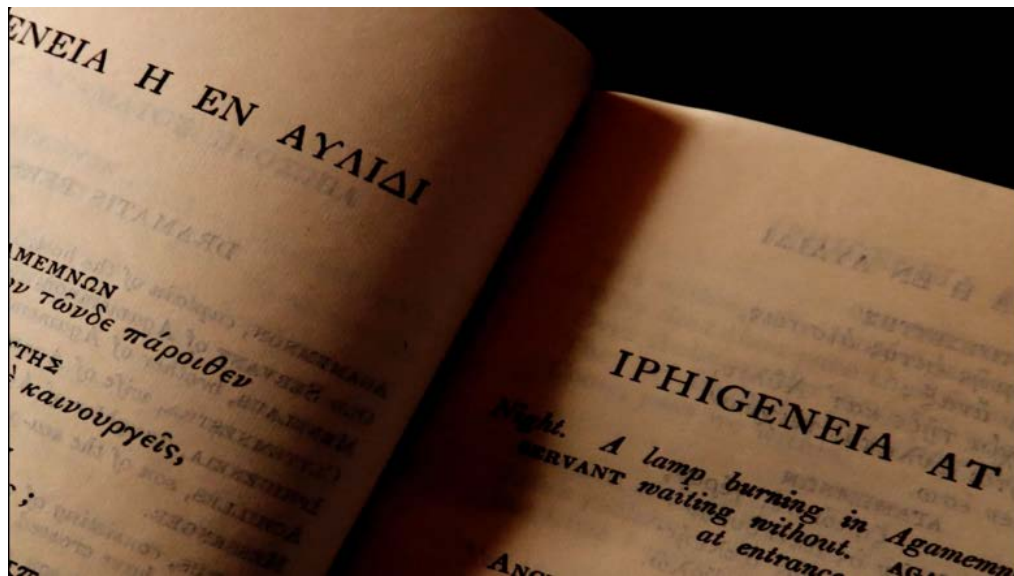
Figure 14. *The Opening Pan of the Greek/English Text of* Iphigeneia at Aulis. *Film Still by Andrea Eis*

An intertitle pulls viewers back thousands of years, leaving the musings of the filmmaker behind. The frame fills with a black sea rolling in hypnotic, slow-motion waves coming straight towards the viewer (Figure 15). An omniscient—though not totally neutral—voiceover narrates a condensed version of the Euripidean story. The voiceover ends speaking of thousands of Greeks and Trojans dying, while the footage ironically lightens to show a blue sea, lit by the sun (Figures 16 and 17).
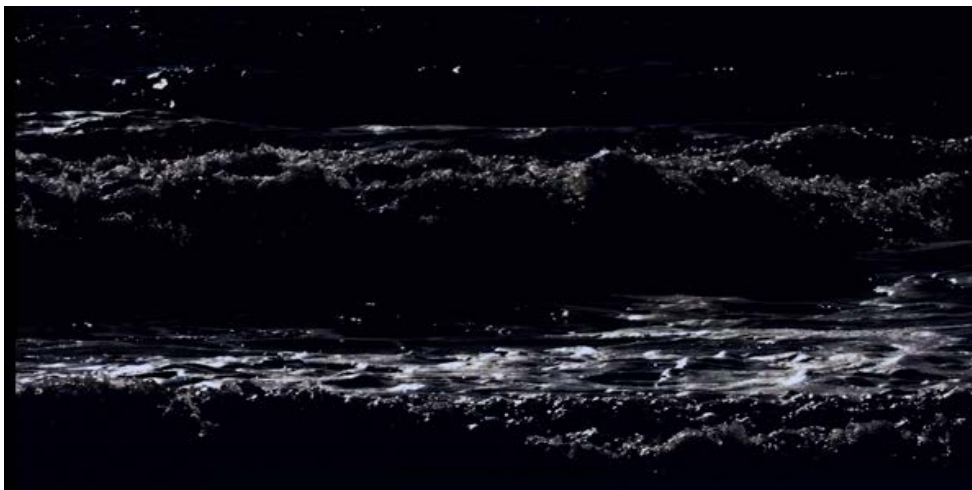
Figures 15, 16, and 17. *The Dark Waves that Slowly Lighten to a Brighter Sea. 2:10 to 3:51. Film Stills by Andrea Eis*

With a change of vocal tone, the narration moves into first-person. explaining the new knowledge: the modern Greek pronunciation of Iphigeneia's name (*a soft exhalation, gliding forward*), which is contrasted with Iphigeneia first being reluctantly 'propelled' towards sacrifice, and her sudden change of heart[36] when she agrees to be sacrificed:

> [Iphigeneia], *on the other hand, was propelled forward.*
> *Until she takes things into her own hands,*
> *and chooses her death.*
>
> *Heroically.*
> *For Greece.*
> *Supposedly.*[37]

Matched with a close-up of randomly strewn, intensely colored flowers spread across the frame, these lines of the voiceover are punctuated by a reverse series of dissolves, as one by one the flowers disappear, until there are none left by the end. All that remains is the rough stone wall upon which the flowers had been spread (Figures 18 and 19). This slow visual and aural march to death is followed by a defense of Helen, the alleged cause of this need for Iphigeneia's sacrifice. As with Iphigeneia's name, Helen's modern Greek name is softer and more lyrical (*eh-LAY-nee*) than in ancient Greek. Cicadas compete with the voiceover. An assertion follows that neither Iphigeneia nor the warriors are sacrificed for Eleni's sake: *Eleni never asks for any of this.* Helen's lack of culpability takes on even more resonance in a later scene on Agamemnon's motivations and male responsibility for the war.
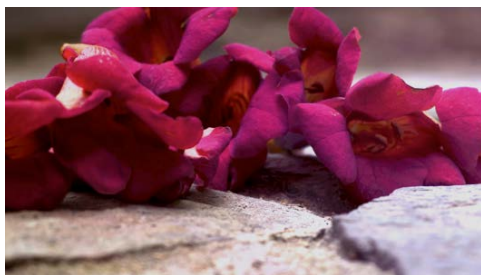
Figures 18 and 19. *Strewn Flowers and the Dissolve on the Final Flower. Film Stills by Andrea Eis*

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36. In *Iphigeneia Changes Her Mind*, Sausone discusses Aristotle "notoriously" averring, in his *Poetics,* that Iphigeneia's tragic character shows inconsistency by changing her mind (D. Sausone, "Iphigeneia Changes Her Mind," *Illinois Classical Studies* 16, no. 1/2 (1991): 161), and other ideas that have been suggested as dramatic motivations for Iphigeneia's decision (Ibid, 161-62).

37. Eis, *Iphigeneia Breathes*, 2021, 4:05-5:19.

We return to the warriors at Aulis, their increasing impatience with the long wait for the winds, their seething frustration. Nature images again serve as objective correlatives, physical representations for what the warriors are feeling and thinking. A peaceful, almost mythical white horse, wanders through a golden field and stops at the edge of a sunken wall of haphazardly strewn stones. The horse calmly raises its head for a moment (Figure 20), as if responding to a small ruffle of wind, then drops it again to sniff at the ground. (*To the warriors waiting at Aulis, the stilling of the winds was a relief. At first.*[38])

Figure 20. *A Horse Responding to a Breeze. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

Unsettled imagery follows—a tangle of plants, weeds silhouetted against dramatic backlit clouds, and a flower protected by a ring of spiky thorns, shaking anxiously in a saturated, high contrast shot, as if in direct correlation to the warriors' growing anger (Figure 21).
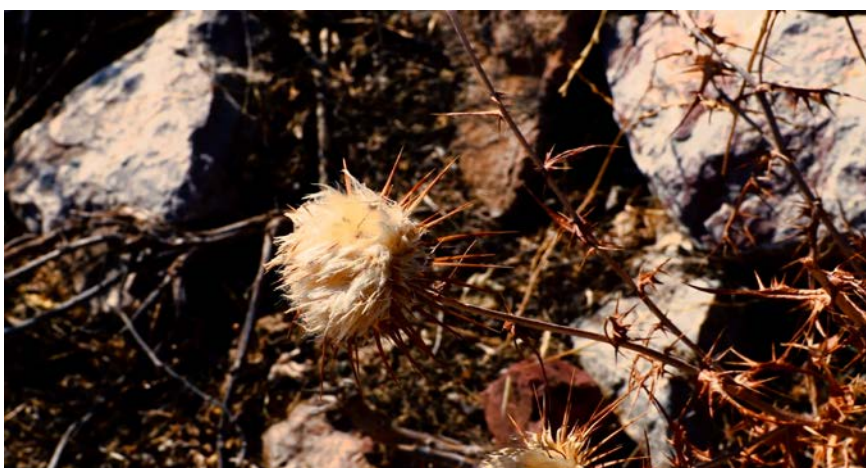
Figure 21. *A Thorn-protected Flower. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

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38. Eis, *Iphigeneia Breathes,* 2021, 6:12-6:20.

This passage focusing on the warriors' emotions leads to one speaking of Agamemnon's motives and ambition. Starting small within the frame of a large black field, waves once again roll relentlessly towards the viewer. The image slowly increases in size, to fill the frame, ending with a fade out as the scope of the resulting tragedy unfolds. Agamemnon's ambitions and the desires of Menelaus are to blame.

> *For Agamemnon,*
> *the sacrifice of*
> *his daughter's life is necessary.*
>
> *To get those warriors moving.*
> *To give them their reason for being.*
> *To give him his reason for leading.*
>
> *They rush forward*
> *to what, for many,*
> *is the sacrifice of their lives.*
>
> *Sacrificed for Agamemnon.*
>
> *For Menelaus.*[39]

In the next segment, the camera first pans across the folds of a crumpled bedsheet. The palpable sound of the cicadas, though not heard on the soundtrack at this point, is referenced in the voiceover as '*a physical weight, a temporal wait.*' Vivid pink flowers suggest the beauty, power, and fragility of life, and the inevitability of death, as they are held, softly crushed, dropped on a white bedspread, set in a line (Figures 22, 23 and 24) during the voiceover.
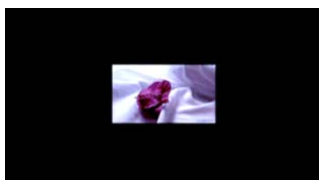
Figures 22, 23, and 24. *Flower Images. Film Stills by Andrea Eis*

> *Wait.*
> *For Agamemnon*
> *to sacrifice one woman —*
> *a girl, really —*
> *so a goddess will restore the winds.*
> *So they can sail to Troy.*

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39. Ibid, 7:05-7:36.

> *The songs of the cicadas are abundant.*
> *Insistent.*[40]

A black frame fills the screen, as a voiceover invites viewers to use their imagination:

> *Just suppose.*
> *Just imagine.*
> *If it had been different.*[41]

And what to imagine? Iphigeneia gives the warriors a different task. She has them say her name over and over, like an incantation—in the modern Greek pronunciation, so that they have to breathe out. With thousands of warriors, and thousands of repetitions of her name, a wind is created that fills the sails.

Embedded in the Present

Imagination Breaks Through a Barrier

> Wind in bodies is called breath, outside bodies it is called air. It is the most powerful of all [bodily nourishments] and it is in all, and it is worthwhile examining its power…[it is] invisible to sight, though visible to reason. For what can take place without it? In what is it not present? What does it not accompany?[42]

Originally, I wrote a script about Agamemnon deciding not to sacrifice Iphigeneia, and then asking her to start an incantation of her name to bring the winds. It was not long before I turned away from the male lead, the male hero, to imagine what a woman could do. At first, I did not go as far with the film's narrative as to imagine Iphigeneia changing the course of history (or myth) when she decides to lead the incantation, other than saving herself from sacrifice. However, this film became embedded in my present in ways that I did not expect. In my mind, the impact of multiple traumas in the world became inextricably connected with my film.

In May of 2020, George Floyd, pleading to the police that he could not breathe, was slowly, painfully, contemptuously murdered. For a long period of time, I had to stop working on *Iphigeneia Breathes.* I did not know how to continue making a film about breathing, after George Floyd had that precious ability

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40. Ibid, 7:52-8:18.
41. Ibid, 8:20-8:26.
42. Hippocrates, "Breaths," in *Hippocrates, Vol. II* (William Heinemann Ltd, 1923), III.4-16.

viciously stolen from him. The pandemic increased relentlessly, also stealing people's abilities to breathe, until ventilators were their only hope, and then of no hope. And thousands in closely packed crowds, performing their own intense incantations, became terrifying and dangerous forces.

What brought me back to editing, to finishing the film, was a re-visioning of my re-visioning. Could the assembled warriors, saying Iphigeneia's name repeatedly and with increasing intensity, be led to realize that there was a choice to be made? Could I use the embodied word as a literal breath of life? By shifting the results of breathing to a positive result—the warriors heading home instead of to Troy—I could imagine a past in which war was avoided, people were not sacrificed because of the beliefs of others, because of the ambitions of others, or because people wanted to use their power over others. Perhaps, just perhaps, a new outcome could be the result of the actions of a woman leading. My improbably optimistic but realistically questioning perspective formed the final message.

A Man's Voice, A Woman's Voice, and Hope

The viewer is invited to join with me in imagining the warriors' incantation of Iphigeneia's name, paired with words describing the winds, and flowers floating in slow motion through the frame, and settling to stillness. The *If-ee-YEN-yas* echo, slightly off sync.

> *Soft If-ee-YEN-yas.*
> *Nearly silent If-ee-YEN-yas.*
> *Great gusts of If-ee-YEN-yas.*
> *A surge of If-ee-YEN-yas.*
>
> *All of them breathing,*
> *as one.*
> *The sails fill with their voices,*
> *their breathing.*
> *While she,*
> *of the lyrical breathing name,*
> *will herself be able*
> *to continue breathing.*[43]

Over a "sea" of thick leaves, oversaturated in color, turning in all directions, elegantly curved but edged with thorns (Figure 25), and with "abundant, insistent" cicadas on the soundtrack, the possibilities emerge:

> *And maybe, when the embodied winds die down,*

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43. Eis, *Iphigeneia Breathes*, 2021, 8:48-9:27.

If-ee-YEN-ya *says her name again.*
If a man's voice can send them to war,
perhaps a woman's voice can turn them towards home.
If-ee-YEN-ya *would not die.*
Thousands would not die.[44]

Figure 25. *A "Sea" of Leaves. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

The cicadas fade out, the sounds of waves fade in, there are three more, magic-suggestive repetitions of *if-ee-YEN-ya.* The cicada sound returns, and intertitles appear:

Thousands of years later.

Sitting by the water
on an island in Greece

I imagine

that
Iphigeneia
breathes.[45]

The film ends with sea glass being gathered up and then dropped from my hand in slow motion (Figure 26), palpably visualizing the past in the shards of glass whose edges have been smoothed by water and time. The slow-motion

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44. Ibid, 9:28-10:01.
45. Ibid, 10:37-10:45.

sound of the falling glass, in a rare synchronous audio passage, adds a heightened intensity. The sound continues after the image has faded to black.
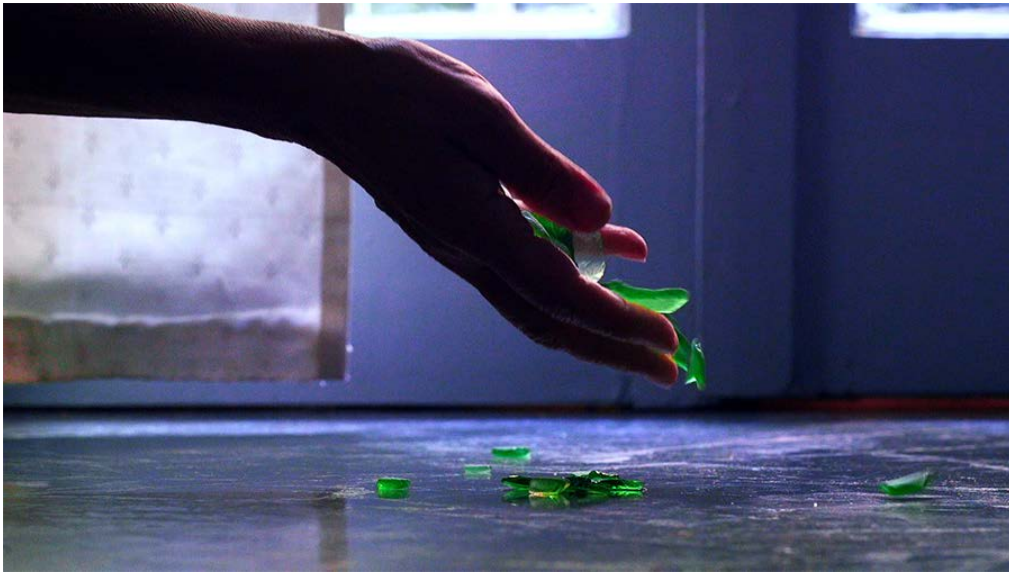
Figure 26. *Dropping Sea Glass. Film Still by Andrea Eis*

Conclusion

The embodiment of Iphigeneia's name in the warriors' breaths changes history, and the Trojan War never happens—because a woman takes steps to change a horrendous fate. Finding the meaning of Iphigeneia's name—strong-born, mighty[46]—had given me the sense that she could be one to change her world. In my telling, embodied language, in a word that is inseparably connected with breathing, living, the wind, and strength, saves Iphigeneia's life, and the lives of thousands of Greeks and Trojans. I found a way to take in and take on the pain that was everywhere in the world around me, by making a film about changing a mythic past. My film, finally finished in December of 2021, serves as an embodiment of my fragile hope for a better future, imagined by one woman and acted upon by another.

My journey as a filmmaker through Iphigeneia's story was accompanied by a complex mix of scholarly, experiential, linguistic, and textual research, but also by unexpected and personal emotional intensity, the contexts of which are not referenced for viewers. As an artist, I know that I cannot control the connotations or associations of my work, and I should not expect to. At best, I construct and

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46. See C. S. Jerram's Introduction to Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris,* in which he discusses the moon-goddess of early inhabitants of Greece (prior to 12th century B.C.E) who became identified with Artemis. One of her epithets was Iphigeneia: "[meaning] the 'strong-born, that is, the 'mighty.'"

frame my own perspective and craft a significance for my images and words with which I can live.

In 1998, Robert Andreach, writing about Ellen McLaughlin's *Iphigeneia and Other Daughters*, said that McLaughlin reinvents and re-centers Greek plays. In Andreach's explanation for how McLaughlin changes the perspective of the plays in more than one way, I found a kinship with my film:

> The first is that for history to change, its victims – those excluded from it or sacrificed to it – must act. The second is that they do not have to act with the motivation of the dominant culture…Killing does not have to be the sole reason for wanting to create history.[47]

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47. R. Andreach, "Ellen McLaughlin's 'Iphigenia and Other Daughters': A Classical Trilogy from a Contemporary Perspective," *Comparative Literature Studies* 35, no. 4 (1998): 391.

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The Old Modernist Challenge: Navigating the Hypermodern World of Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

By Andrew Terleckyj[*]

While many critics believe technology and media create a postmodern world of endless simulacrum, fractured identity, and vanishing boundaries in White Noise, this essay explores the possibility that DeLillo's text in fact reveals the hypermodernist world of Paul Virilio, resisting these apocalyptic consequences of technology. Daniel Joseph Singal's definition of Modernism helps to show how central aims of the Modernist project – that is, to achieve authenticity and reintegrate Victorian dichotomies – are not only possible but also imperative to achieve in White Noise, for the text implicitly suggests that rejecting Modernist principles may result in a national, epistemic crisis. More specifically, the novel points to one particular stream of Modernist culture as the antidote to epistemic failure. This stream, which Singal attributes to John Dewey, inspirits the novel's central Modernist characters: Jack and Denise Gladney. Using Modernist ideologies, these two characters successfully find authenticity and meaning in a growingly complex technological world.

The prophetic warnings in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* might explain the perpetual interest modern critics take in revisiting the novel, coincidentally and almost too appropriately published in the year George Orwell used for the title of his own prophetic work. In the worlds of both *1984* and *White Noise*, technology threatens to destabilize not only the individual, but also the foundations of American democracy. With the advent of the internet, these fictional worlds have, in many ways, begun to manifest themselves in the twenty-first century. Data mining companies, for instance, now reflect the technological surveillance of Big Brother. To be sure, this reflection does not exactly match the extreme authoritarianism of an Orwellian dystopia. On the other hand, it seems that *White Noise* has in fact accurately foreshadowed the current state of American society. Most notably, the proliferation of both fake news and authoritative knowledge on the internet has created what Murray Jay Siskind, Jack Gladney's university colleague, calls "a world of hostile facts,"[1] driving some Americans, in an act of self-preservation, to "seal off the world."

For many right-leaning Americans, this self-preservation requires a frightening detachment from reality. In one of his most recent op-eds, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks offers a compelling theory to explain this disturbing phenomenon. He cites the research of Jonathan Rauch,[2] which explores how "democratic, neotheocratic societies" navigate the modern age of information to

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1. Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Penguin Books, 1985), 82.
2. Jonathan Rauch, "The Constitution of Knowledge," *National Affairs*, no. 45 (2018).

establish some form of authoritative truth.[3] As Brooks puts it, an "epistemic regime" comprised of "academics, clergy members, teachers, journalists, and others" sift through endless information to identify and then disseminate truths that "survive collective scrutiny." This process, however, has rewarded its participants with money and status while those left out of the process – namely non-college educated citizens – have seen their communities deteriorate in the twenty-first century. According to Brooks,

> This precarity has created, in nation after nation, intense populist backlashes against the highly educated folks who have migrated to the cities and accrued significant economic, cultural and political power. …
>
> In the fervor of this enmity, millions of people have come to detest those who populate the epistemic regime … Millions not only distrust everything the "fake news" people say, but also the so-called rules they use to say them.
>
> People in this precarious state are going to demand stories that will both explain their distrust back to them and also enclose them within a safe community of believers.

As a result, two American realities have emerged, one in which citizens have fully realized Jack's fear of "promot[ing] ignorance, prejudice and superstition to protect [themselves] from the world."[4]

Critics have certainly discussed this kind of self-preservation in *White Noise*. N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge argue that "Rationality in *White Noise* is always on the brink of being overwhelmed" and that as a result, individuals submit themselves to "any kind of apparently authoritative direction."[5] Patrick J. Deneen makes a similar argument, suggesting that DeLillo's novel portrays "the decline of religious belief and the pressing need for its sustenance and reaffirmation."[6] Deneen goes on to argue that such a need for authoritative guidance, as well as "rising individualism" and "materialism" in the novel, foreshadow a self-destructive future for American democracy.[7] Clearly, critics agree that *White Noise* depicts a potentially threatening postmodern world; to what degree of danger that world presents, however, is up for debate.

At one end of the spectrum, Leonard Wilcox claims the novel reveals the death of authenticity and the "obliteration of coherent meaning" in a "world of

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3. David Brooks, *The Rotting of the Republican Mind* (The New York Times, 26 November 2020).

4. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 95.

5. N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, "Toxic Events: Postmodernism and DeLillo's *White Noise*," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1994): 304.

6. Patrick J. Deneen, "The American Mystery Deepens: Hearing Tocqueville in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*," in *Democracy's Literature: Politics and Fiction in America* (eds.) Patrick J. Deneen and Joseph Romance (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 209.

7. Ibid, 209.

simulacra, where images and electronic representations replace direct experience."[8] Lidia Yuknavitch agrees; and, while both Wilcox and Yuknavitch describe Jack as a "Modernist,"[9] they ultimately believe the postmodern world in *White Noise* has long obliterated any traces of Modernist ideals.[10] To be sure, Wilcox admits that DeLillo's "postmodernism retains the legacy of the modernist impulse to explore consciousness and selfhood and to create an imaginative vision that probes and criticizes its subject matter";[11] at the same time, however, his argument suggests that such a Modernist impulse is ultimately futile in the world of *White Noise*.

Many critics dispute this futility, however. One such critic is William S. Haney II, who claims that a new, transcendent self-identity is possible in *White Noise*. Rather than succumb to alienation and fragmentation, characters in the novel integrate their consciousness with the collective hyperreality of cyberspace.[12] Susan S Martins, however, rightly criticizes scholars like Haney, who see utopian potential in the relationships between technology and the characters in the novel. She also criticizes Wilcox for his dystopian reading of technology, arguing that "*White Noise* does not function as a straightforward dystopian tale, but instead negotiates the tenuous relationship between utopia and dystopia" and depicts our "ambivalent" experience with technology.[13] Lou F. Caton goes as far as to suggest Romantic values and ideals can in fact survive DeLillo's postmodern minefield.[14]

While Jack Gladney certainly displays an occasional Romantic sensibility, he is, at heart, a Modernist. And, although critics debate whether Jack's Modernist order can survive in the postmodern world of *White Noise*, most (if not all) critics affirm without question the existence of this "postmodern" world. However, as C. Barry Chabot argues, it is indeed possible that postmodernism as a "period concept" does not yet exist.[15] If true, Chabot's argument leaves room for a new approach to *White Noise*. More specifically, it allows for the possibility that Jack

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8. Leonard Wilcox, "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative," *Contemporary Literature* 32, no. 3 (1991): 346-347.

9. Ibid, 348; Lidia Yuknavitch, *Allegories of Violence: Tracing the Writing of War in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Routledge, 2001), 63.

10. Yuknavitch, *Allegories of Violence: Tracing the Writing of War in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction*, 2001, 63.

11 Wilcox, "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative," 1991, 362.

12. William S. II. Haney, "Culture, History and Consciousness in DeLillo's *White Noise*: TheAesthetics of Cyberspace." *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 6 (1997): 11-12.

13. Susana S. Martins, "*White Noise* and Everyday Technologies," *American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2005): 88, 90.

14. Lou F. Caton, *Don DeLillo* (Bloom's Modern Critical Views) (Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 107.

15. C. Barry. Chabot, "The Problem of the Postmodern," *New Literary History* 20, no. 1 (1988): 10.

does not in fact live in a postmodern world at all; instead, the novel reflects the potentially menacing reality of "hypermodernism." John Armitage uses this term to describe the worldview of French theorist Paul Virilio,[16] who not only remained "true to the principle of hope with regard to making sense of history,"[17] but also rejected nihilistic, postmodern views of technology and its effects on reality. While remaining cautiously optimistic about the future, Virilio nevertheless acknowledges the precariousness of hypermodernism, predicting to some degree a catastrophic collapse of modernity. *White Noise*, however, suggests that core pillars of the Modernist worldview – including a preoccupation with authenticity and a desire to re-integrate Victorian dichotomies – can still provide meaningful and valuable support for Americans as they navigate Virilio's current, dangerously hypermodernist landscape.

While the infinite flux of electronic information has certainly expedited the loss of authoritative truth, it has only further broken-down what Modernism has been deconstructing since the early twentieth century; media, therefore, does not exactly create a "postmodern" world in *White Noise* as much as it contributes to the ongoing Modernist project. Critical to this reading of the novel is Daniel Joseph Singal's approach to articulating the definition of Modernism. He identifies "two predominant 'streams' of American Modernist culture,"[18] and argues the first stream begins with William James and the second with John Dewey. He explains how James's stream of Modernist culture "banished the closed, deterministic universe of nineteenth-century positivism in favor of an 'open' universe governed by change and chance where the process of discovery would be continuous" and where human beings were "doomed forever to epistemological uncertainty."[19] Dewey likewise accepted the "tentative, pragmatic character of knowledge" and rejected the existence of "fixed truths."[20] There is perhaps no better moment in *White Noise* to illustrate this Modernist ideology than when Jack drives his son, Heinrich, to school and asks him whether it is raining. Using relativist logic, Heinrich dodges each of Jack's attempts to elicit objective truth from his son, claiming "senses are wrong more often than they're right" and asking, "'What good is my truth? My truth means nothing."[21] At one point, Heinrich asks his father if he wants "the truth of someone traveling at almost the speed of light in another galaxy"[22] – an almost direct allusion to the "new physics" that inspired Modernist thought by suggesting "everything

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16. John Armitage, "Paul Virilio: An Introduction," in *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond* (ed.) John Armitage (SAGE Publications, 2000), 9.

17. Ibid, 8.

18. Daniel Joseph Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1987): 17.

19. Ibid, 17.

20. Ibid, 17.

21. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 23.

22. Ibid, 23.

depended on the relative position and motion of the observer and the object being observed."[23] Heinrich's relativism, therefore, does not reflect the consequences of a postmodern, media-saturated world but rather illustrates the Jamesian impulse to question objectivity.

Of course, Heinrich ultimately refuses to answer Jack's question, and the conclusion of their conversation further debunks the existence of a "postmodernism" world in *White Noise*. Frustrated by Heinrich's stubborn evasions, Jack sarcastically quips, "'First-rate … A victory for uncertainty, randomness and chaos. Science's finest hour.'"[24] While it might be true that Jack's annoyance stems from his frustrated "romantic desire to join with his son in an appreciation of an intimate and shared physical event,"[25] it is also compelling to note the similarities Jack shares with John Dewey, who gave "greater recognition [than James] to the virtues of rationality and science."[26] To be sure, Jack understands that truth is unstable; at one point, while watching Heinrich pontificate at the dinner table, he reflects, "I wanted to tell [Heinrich] that statistical evidence of the kind he was quoting from was by nature inconclusive and misleading. I wanted to say that he would learn to regard all such catastrophic findings with equanimity as he matured, grew out of his confining literalism, developed a spirit of informed and skeptical inquiry, advanced in wisdom and rounded judgment."[27] Jack embodies Deweyan Modernism; he acknowledges uncertainty but nevertheless values an admittedly ephemeral stability – the kind of stability that "epistemic regimes" offer. Jack's conflict with Heinrich is therefore less of a "Romantic hero" railing against a postmodern world and more of a "Deweyan-Modernist hero" railing against a *Jamesian*-Modernist world.

American society in *White Noise* is not only Modernist, however; it is *successfully* Modernist, mainly because the text implies a nearly complete eradication of Victorian ideals. According to Singal, "combat[ing] the fundamentally dishonest conception of existence that the Victorians had propagated" became the chief aim of twentieth-century Modernist thinkers and writers.[28] This enterprise appears to have succeeded in DeLillo's text; Jack describes Blacksmith as "a town of dry cleaning shops and opticians. Photos of looming Victorian homes decorate the windows of real estate firms. These pictures have not changed in years. The homes are sold or gone or stand in other towns in other states."[29] Elise Martucci reads this description metaphorically and

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23. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 12.

24. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 24.

25. Caton, *Don DeLillo*, 2003, 115.

26. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 17.

27. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 167.

28. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 12.

29. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 59.

concludes that Blacksmith is a postmodern town of "empty representations,"[30] but this reading seems to ignore the Victorianism at the heart of the passage. It is significant that Blacksmith literally lacks Victorian surroundings. While these homes may have existed at one point, the novel makes it clear that Victorianism no longer offers the protective shelter it may have once provided. The penultimate chapter of the novel further supports this point, as Sister Hermann Marie, the nun who attends Jack's gunshot wound, turns out to be an "empty representation" herself. She tells Jack, "It is our task in the world to believe things no one else takes seriously. To abandon such beliefs completely, the human race would die. This is why we are here. A tiny minority. To embody old things, old beliefs. The devil, the angels, heaven, hell. If we did not pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse."[31] Like the photographic shells of Victorian homes, the nuns represent the vestige of Victorian ideals; the once stable dichotomies of "heaven and hell" or "angels and devils" have all but vanished, leaving in their wake an almost too successful Modernist world.

Contrary to what some critics argue, however, dichotomies and boundaries do not entirely disappear in *White Noise*, disproving yet again the existence of a postmodern reality and reaffirming a hypermodernist one. That is not to say, however, that boundaries consistently hold up against the forces of technological change. For instance, the text frequently threatens the boundary between the real and the hyperreal: television and radio penetrate Jack's narration; a Toyota commercial speaks through Steffie as she sleeps;[32] and, by the end of the novel, it seems that Willie Mink, the former head of the Dylar project, has completely transcended the boundary between consciousness and hyperreality. As Wilcox argues, "Mink is the embodiment of white noise" as he "voices the drone of the mediascapes."[33] Undoubtedly, Mink personifies simulacrum; the subject – that is, Mink – almost completely collapses. Wilcox believes this represents "postmodern culture,"[34] but Martins, on the other hand, points to the absurdity of Mink's condition as a sign of parody. As she sees it, believing that human beings can lose critical distance between themselves and hyperreality is just as absurd as Mink literalizing words.[35] This particular reading is compelling, especially because Martins persuasively shows how the Gladneys do not lose their ability to distinguish the real from the hyperreal. Television and radio certainly influence the Gladneys' perception of the "toxic airborne event," but they use their own phenomenal experiences to ground their perceptions in reality. Martins

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30. Elise A. Martucci, *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (Routledge, 2007), 78.

31. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 303.

32. Ibid, 148.

33. Ibid, 356.

34. Wilcox, "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative," 1991, 355.

35. Martins, "*White Noise* and Everyday Technologies," 2005, 107.

concludes: "The difference between the media representation and what the Gladneys can see happening outside their own window is not effaced - it's not as though they have lost their ability to distinguish among the levels of the 'real' they must navigate."[36] Likewise, while Virilio admits to the primacy of the "virtual" in shaping hypermodern reality, he nevertheless maintains that both the virtual *and* the phenomenal interact to create the "real."[37] Thus, *White Noise* captures the synergistic reality of hypermodernism as well as the Modernist paradox: as Singal describes it, "the goal of perfect integration must always remain unattainable."[38] Simulacrum fails to dominate the real; instead, the two interact synergistically without ever completely losing their distinctions.

Another central binary of the text is the dichotomy between life and death, but again, the boundary between the two remains intact by the end of the novel. Nevertheless, Jack and Babette challenge this separation when they discuss their fear of death. Babette asks her husband:

> "What if death is nothing but sound?'
> "Electrical noise."
> "You hear it forever. Sound all around, How awful."
> "Uniform, white."[39]

Here, Babette introduces the titular, fluid metaphor of the novel. Death becomes synonymous with the "electrical noise" of everyday life. And yet, Babette's use of the hypothetical "if" is telling; it reveals her skepticism and foreshadows Dylar's failure to obliterate this dichotomy. Upon entering Willie Mink's motel room, Jack discovers the dehumanizing effect of the drug. Sitting alone and nearly comatose, Mink devours Dylar tablets and parrots the television in his room. As Jack puts it, "White noise was everywhere."[40] Death surrounds Mink; borders vanish; distinction blurs. Despite this, Mink's revolutionary drug fails to eradicate death and the meaning it offers life. When Jack says "Falling plane," Mink "grips the arms of his chair" and experiences panic; when Jack taunts him further with the phrase "Plunging aircraft," Mink ducks into a fetal position.[41] Dylar has failed; Mink still fears death, which, according to Wilcox, represents the "ending" life needs to "take on meaning."[42] To be fair, Wilcox never suggests the process of eroding "temporal endings" is successful in

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36. Ibid, 106.

37. Dominique Joubert and Christian Carlut, "Paul Virilio," in *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews* (ed.) John Armitage (SAGE Publications, 2001), 125-126.

38. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 14.

39. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 189.

40. Ibid, 295.

41. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 295.

42. Wilcox, "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative," 1991, 361.

DeLillo's contemporary America. He rather points to the process itself as evidence of the collapsing Modernist world. This is certainly a persuasive argument; nevertheless, the ultimate failure of Dylar is significant. At the very least, it temporarily refutes Babette's metaphor; for even in the midst of the awful, uniform white noise, the distinct sound of death manages to break through the ambient babble of Mink's motel room and preserve the Modernist worldview.

Although it may seem that such preservation is only temporary, the novel offers as many signs of Modernism's stability and success as it does its instability and failures. Critics seem eager to pronounce the death of authenticity in *White Noise*, but there is surely evidence in DeLillo's text to imply otherwise. Of course, a fragmented subject no longer capable of establishing an authentic self would surely signal a fading – if not a completely diminished – Modernist world. Modernists, after all, demand "nothing less than 'authenticity,' which requires a blending of the conscious and unconscious strata of the mind so that the self-presented to the world is the 'true' self in every respect."[43] While no one in the novel achieves a perfect blending, Murray implicitly suggests that individualism pervades America. He explains to Jack:

> I tell my students they're already too old to figure importantly in the making of society. Minute by minute they're beginning to diverge from each other. 'Even as we sit here,' I tell them, 'you are spinning out from the core, becoming less recognizable as a group, less targetable by advertisers and mass-producers of culture. Kids are a true universal. But you're well beyond that, already beginning to drift, to feel estranged from the products you consume. Who are they designed for? What is your place in the marketing scheme? Once you're out of school, it is only a matter of time before you experience the vast loneliness and dissatisfaction of consumers who have lost their group identity.'[44]

Murray is the absurd and oppressive voice of late-capitalism, suggesting that citizens are only useful insomuch as they conform and contribute to mass consumerism. But the very reason his college students have lost their "usefulness" has to do with their individuality. The way Murray describes it, corporations do not create identities as much as they cater to them, and the diverse identities of young adults and beyond present a challenge to advertisers who struggle to confine this demographic to a coherent "group identity." The Modernist movement in search of authenticity has succeeded in producing an individualistic society.

Perhaps the problem with authenticity, then, has less to do with fragmented identities and more to do with hyper-individualism as citizens turn to extreme measures to achieve originality in a hyper-individualized world. Jack earns critical acclaim for inventing and eventually overseeing Hitler studies at his

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43. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 14.
44. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 50.

university[45] – an academic field that is both absurd and not a little sinister. Jack appears to have stripped Hitler of his "moral significance" and treats him more as a "commodity on the academic market" than as a genocidal dictator.[46] What motivates Jack to create this deeply problematic and socially poisonous field of study is his quest for individuality. As Murray eventually points out, "Hitler is larger than Death. You [Jack] thought he would protect you."[47] Death in this novel, as Babette makes clear earlier on, is the white noise of electrical messaging that bombards and surrounds citizens like Jack every day. At the cost of society's moral fabric, Jack uses Hitler to break through this noise of endless information. At one point, Murray tells Jack that he envies his accomplishments: "'You've established a wonderful thing here with Hitler. You created it, you nurtured it, you made it your own ... It has an identity, a sense of achievement."[48] This unique identity rings hollow for Jack, however, especially after the chancellor advises him to change his name to J. A. K. Gladney and gain weight to avoid making "a feeble presentation of self."[49] The chancellor pushes Jack to the edge of hyper-individualism, which – unsurprisingly – moves Jack further from achieving authenticity. As Jack himself proclaims: "I am the false character that follows the name around."[50]

But this failure to achieve authenticity does not preclude eventual success; furthermore, Jack's awareness of his inauthentic persona reveals an impressive ability to self-reflect. In fact, like a true Modernist, Jack does not allow his failures to deter his search for an authentic self. However, it is important to note that a technologized mass culture presents a clear challenge for the Modernist who seeks her true identity and fears the "colonization of the mind by media."[51] Lou Caton makes an important argument regarding this point:

> the world is turning [Jack] into a post-industrial, computer generated individual, someone who is slowly gaining a "non-authentic self" which is socially constructed, essentially valueless, and enveloped by an unstable matrix of material goods. …
> Jack Gladney, then, is both "timelessly" searching for unification and arbitrarily fragmented. This double-self [is] a self both materially constructed by a fragmented, commercial community and one authentically trying to construct a unified community.[52]

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45. Ibid, 4.
46. Reeve and Kerridge, "Toxic Events: Postmodernism and DeLillo's *White Noise*," 1994, 307.
47. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 274.
48. Ibid, 11.
49. Ibid, 16.
50. Ibid, 17.
51. Hossein Pirnajmuddin and Bahareh Bagherzadeh Samani, "Don DeLillo's White Noise: A Virilian Perspective," *Text Matters* 9, no. 9 (2019): 361.
52. Caton, *Don DeLillo*, 2003, 109-110.

So while it is true that a fragmented self exists, an active, authentic self also exists, and it certainly emerges at times throughout the novel. For example, as Caton argues, Jack "deeply values his personal relations and family,"[53] and he knows this. "Make no mistake," Jack says, "I take these children seriously."[54] This represents another moment when Jack reveals a confident sign of self-knowledge. Jack is aware of what he values; and when he flails as the department chair of Hitler studies, he knows it because he knows himself.

Jack's final confrontation with Mink, however, reveals the clearest victory for authenticity in the novel. Modernism, in fact, prevents Jack from slipping into a moral abyss, and for this reason, *White Noise* implicitly encourages the Modernist preoccupation with introspection. Prior to Jack's murderous escapade, he theorizes with Murray, who reminds Jack of "a fund, a pool, a reservoir of potential violence in the male psyche."[55] But unlike the Modernist, who tries to "integrate once more the human and the animal, the civilized and the savage, and to heal the sharp divisions that the nineteenth century had established,"[56] Murray offers Jack a disturbing dichotomy in true Victorian fashion: "'Are you a killer or a dier, Jack?'"[57] For Murray, there is only the animalistic "killer" or the civilized "dier." Jack accepts the binary, and when he commits to the role of killer and rejects his more civilized self, he nearly loses all sense of identity in a moment of extrasensory transcendence. He moves "Nearer to death,"[58] and describes his experience with detachment:

> Things glowed, a secret life rising out of them. Water struck the roof in elongated orbs, splashing drams. I knew for the first time what rain really was. I knew what wet was. I understood the neurochemistry of my brain, the meaning of dreams (the waste material of premonitions). Great stuff everywhere, racing through the room, racing slowly. A richness, a density. I believed everything. I was a Buddhist, a Jain, a Duck River Baptist. My only sadness was Babette, having to kiss a scooped out face.[59]

Jack's consciousness expands, and he loses all sense of subjectivity. He is no longer an individual with values; instead, he embodies all beliefs at once and nearly obliterates his own humanity by reducing meaning to the chemical reactions taking place in his brain. And yet, almost as a prelude to his moral awakening, his description ends with a hopeful sign that Murray's Victorian dichotomy has not yet subsumed the authentic Jack Gladney: he remembers Babette. He remembers that he values family, and that value keeps him grounded

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53. Ibid, 109.
54. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 102.
55. Ibid, 279.
56. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 12.
57. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 278.
58. Ibid, 295.
59. Ibid, 269.

in the real. The pivotal moment, however, strikes when Mink shoots Jack in the wrist:

> The world collapsed inward, all those vivid textures and connections buried in mounds of ordinary stuff. I was disappointed. Hurt, stunned and disappointed. … The extra dimensions, the super perceptions, were reduced to visual clutter, a whirling miscellany, meaninglessness.
> I looked at him. Alive. His lap a puddle of blood. With the restoration of the normal order of matter and sensation, I felt I was seeing him for the first time as a person. The old human muddles and quirks were set flowing again. Compassion, remorse, mercy.[60]

Jack "inwardly collapses"; in other words, he returns to a subjective state of consciousness. What is significant here, though, is the irony of his reaction to this. He calls this kind of reality – a reality grounded in subjective experience – "meaningless" when in fact his earlier state of being dehumanized Mink and minimized all of human thought to mere chemical reactions. In his "meaningless" state, on the other hand, he remembers perhaps the most important human trait: compassion. Significantly here, Jack becomes a human being only after Mink *shoots* him; Jack's potentially fatal wound forces him to abandon the meaningless Victorian binary and, instead, "integrate once more the human and the animal." Jack becomes killer and dier simultaneously, achieving a Modernist integration that ultimately leads to Jack's critical revelation: his authentic self is, at the very least, compassionate.

Regardless of Jack's final realization, he is still an outdated Modernist – or as Caton argues, an outdated Romantic – lost in a new age. But the Gladney children, who represent the next and perhaps more important generation, have *only* existed in DeLillo's hypermodernist world, and it is through these characters that the novel offers some guidance in navigating the complexities of the information age. Even Jack acknowledges that his children belong to a generation where "deeper codes and messages" mark their "species as unique."[61] Of all the Gladney children, Denise seems to offer the most hope for her "species," and moreover, she embodies Modernist sensibilities. In many ways, the rest of the children function as her foils, for they fail to follow the basic tenets of Modernism. *White Noise* therefore functions as a sort of cautionary tale, using the children to suggest that Modernist ideals might be the key to unlocking a meaningful existence in the age of technology.

Other than his extreme Deweyan Modernist ideology, there are several other problems with Denise's first foil: Heinrich. Key among these issues include his postmodern nihilism and his lack of interest in developing an authentic self. Much like Jack in his extrasensory state of consciousness, Heinrich rejects

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60. Ibid, 298-299.
61. Ibid, 50.

subjectivity and devalues human experience. He tells his father: "'Who knows what I want to do? Who knows what anyone wants to do? … Isn't it all a question of brain chemistry, signals going back and forth, electrical energy in the cortex?'"[62] Not only does Heinrich foreshadow his father's disturbing immorality, he also suggests authenticity is impossible to achieve. He has given up on the Modernist project, and this surrender to an eternally inauthentic self produces the same apathy towards morality that it later produces in Jack. At one point, Heinrich says over the phone, "'Animals commit incest all the time. So how unnatural can it be?'"[63] It is no wonder that Babette fears Heinrich "will end up in a barricaded room, spraying hundreds of rounds of automatic fire across an empty mall before the SWAT teams come for him."[64] While Babette is certainly exaggerating, she nevertheless has cause for concern. Through his immature, existential angst, Heinrich loses sight of humanity: he fully accepts the "animal" but totally rejects the "human," and this runs counter to a more Modernist integration of the two. Heinrich thus reflects the "Virilian idea that barbarism is the integral accident of technology" and the end of modernity and hypermodernism.[65]

Wilder too represents a rejection of Modernism, but he also represents a rejection of hypermodernism, and the text makes it clear that existing in a such a limbo is dangerous – especially in the midst of the current technological revolution. What is most interesting about Wilder is the fact that he cannot watch television, which, as Jack says, "may make him worth talking to … as a sort of wild child, a savage plucked from the bush."[66] And indeed he does become a "wild child" as he fails to develop language: a central motif in the novel, signifying a form of being. By the end of the text, Jack admits Wilder has a problem: "'Is it my imagination … or is he talking less than ever?'"[67] It is true that too much television in *White Noise* can obstruct the formation of an authentic identity; but no television at all seems to have the same effect, explaining in part why Virilio "does not provide a blanket condemnation of modernity."[68] As he puts it, the "global dimensions of the twentieth century" entail "the absolute speed and power of the twentieth century's telecommunications, nuclear energy and so on, and at the same time the absolute catastrophe of this same energy! We're living with both of these things!"[69] By artificially preserving Wilder from the damaging effects of media, Jack and Babette simultaneously prevent their son from

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62. Ibid, 45.

63. Ibid, 34.

64. Ibid, 22.

65. Pirnajmuddin and Bahareh Bagherzadeh Samani, "Don DeLillo's White Noise: A Virilian Perspective," 2019, 359.

66. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 50.

67. Ibid, 252.

68. Armitage, "Paul Virilio: An Introduction," 2000, 7-8.

69. Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Not Words but Visions!" in *Virilio Live: Selected Interviews* (ed.) John Armitage (SAGE Publications, 2001), 155.

experiencing the potential power and reality of his surroundings. But Modernism does not suppress or avoid reality; unlike Wilder, it confronts the world as it is. In the final chapter of the novel, Wilder literally moves counter to the "modernist stream" of the expressway,[70] which sounds like "a remote and steady murmur around our sleep, as of dead souls babbling at the edge of a dream."[71] Caton offers a helpful analysis of this description, believing "the dead are mythically revived, muttering and rippling at the edge of consciousness. Their voices belong to past story-tellers who have refused to be silenced. They represent an imaginary over-soul that resists this culture's particular ideology."[72] The "modernist stream" of the expressway resists DeLillo's "postmodern" culture, and when Wilder crosses against the flow of that traffic, he nearly dies and cannot hear the warning calls of two elderly women.[73] He survives, but there is nothing waiting for him on the other side; it takes the compassion of a driver to save Wilder from his fruitless effort to resist the flow of Modernism. In other words, resisting and rejecting a world of Modernist and technological chaos is a deadly path that leads nowhere.

The Gladney girls, unlike the boys, appear to be more grounded in objective reality. Although Steffie and Denise seem like an inseparable pair, the latter child offers more hope and guidance in *White Noise*; she is the understated hero of the novel. Steffie, on the other hand, succumbs to simulacra. Thomas J. Ferraro nevertheless defends Steffie, calling her "diplomatic" and arguing that she "conducts the caretaking role … efficiently and intelligently."[74] Her participation in the ludicrous SIMUVAC drills,[75] however, undercuts whatever intelligence Ferraro claims she possesses. During their simulated drills after the toxic airborne event, SIMUVAC reminds its participants, including Steffie, that "We learned a lot during the night of the billowing cloud. But there is no substitute for a planned simulation."[76] Both SIMUVAC and Steffie mistake simulation for reality. While it is tempting to forgive Steffie for what seems to be innocent, childish behavior, her subconscious attraction to the hyperreal throughout the novel is foreboding. In addition to her commercialized sleep-talking, she sits in front of the T.V. set and "moves her lips, attempting to match the words as they were spoken,"[77] Steffie surrenders her identity to the brainwashing signals of mass media.

But Denise stands apart from her siblings and half-siblings. Like her step-father, she strives for authenticity. At one point, Jack makes note of the green visor Denise has worn "for three weeks now. She would not go out without it,

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70. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 307.

71. Ibid, 4.

72. Caton, *Don DeLillo*, 2003, 112.

73. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 307.

74. Thomas J. Ferraro, "Whole Families Shopping at Night!" in *New Essays on White Noise (TheAmerican Novel)* (ed.) Frank Lentricchia (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 33.

75. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 195.

76. Ibid, 196.

77. Ibid, 84.

would not even leave her room. … Something about the visor seemed to speak to her, to offer wholeness and identity."[78] Jack assumes that Denise forms an identity through signifiers, but a few chapters later, he notices that "Steffie came in wearing Denise's green visor. I didn't know what this meant."[79] At the very least, it means he assumed incorrectly. Denise abandons her visor because unlike Jack, her identity does not rely on materialism. She knows that material objects ultimately fail to help her locate authenticity. For Denise, possessions are more about preserving the past and tethering herself to the real and to experience: "She is the kind of child who feels a protective tenderness toward her own belongings. It is part of her strategy in a world of displacements to make every effort to restore and preserve, keep things together for their value as remembering objects, a way of fastening herself to a life."[80] Wilder has nothing to restore or preserve; Steffie willingly participates in the world of displacements; and Heinrich fastens himself to nothing. To be sure, Denise occasionally succumbs to the influences of media; she believes she experiences the symptoms of the toxic airborne event only after she learns of these symptoms on the radio. But what separates Denise from the rest of the Gladney children is her refusal to cut ties with history, the real, and experience – each of which significantly contribute to an authentic self.

Furthermore, Denise embraces the Modernist urge to refuse binaries and "restore a sense of order to human experience under the often chaotic conditions of twentieth century existence."[81] (Singal 8). When Jack first describes Denise, he calls her a "hard-nosed kid. She led a more or less daily protest against those of her mother's habits that struck her as wasteful or dangerous."[82] A deep concern drives Denise to care for her parents compassionately and realistically. Out of all the Gladney children, Denise appears to exhibit the most compassion, refusing her step-father's lies and demanding to know more about the drug that is negatively affecting her mother. This Modernist impulse to "know 'reality' in all its depths and complexity" leads Denise into a significant exchange with her mother.[83] Concerned about toxic chemicals, Denise urges her mother to stop chewing gum. Babette expresses her Victorian "either/or" mentality when she responds, "'Look, either I chew gum or I smoke."[84] Denise responds, "Why not do both?" She may be sarcastic, but she implicitly reveals her capacity to move beyond binaries and simple truths. Unlike her mother who reads tabloids and cult mysteries, Denise reads the *Physician's Desk Reference* to learn more about the side effects that plague Babette.[85] Moreover, Babette admits that if "Denise is the

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78. Ibid, 37.
79. Ibid, 63.
80. Ibid, 102.
81. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 8.
82. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 7.
83. Singal, "Towards a Definition of American Modernism," 1987, 16.
84. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 42.
85. Ibid, 36-37.

source of a rumor or theory, it could very well be true."[86] Denise is the true promise of Modernism because she successfully applies Modernist ideologies while *growing up* in a hypermodernist world. She understands the transient nature of knowledge, but she nevertheless seeks and redefines complex truths for the sake of her family and her own authentic self.

Regardless of whether America has become a postmodern world, the nation is undoubtedly experiencing its own airborne toxic event. Through smartphones, television, and other countless technological channels, waves and radiation transmit infinite knowledge, spread poisonous uncertainty, and, as we have surprisingly discovered, instill resentment. Epistemic regimes have failed; the right-leaning Babettes of the world have found the information age unbearable. And, as Davis Brooks argues, "For those awash in anxiety and alienation, who feel that everything is spinning out of control, conspiracy theories are extremely effective emotional tools." This proves true in *White Noise*, as Babette retreats from a world of "hostile facts" and finds solace in conspiracy magazines like the *National Examiner*. It is no wonder that she finds the ad for Dylar in one of these magazines.[87] The drug is a false promise, and the same is true for the magazine. The "cradles of misinformation" that Babette and so many right-leaning Americans turn to for stability have ironically destabilized and threatened the progress of Modernist thinkers,[88] and they have perhaps set the stage for the Virilian "integral accident" that will finally obliterate the hypermodernist world. But there is still hope for national cohesion and repair. As Susan Martins explains, "technologies require highly visible cultural work in the public arena to incorporate them into existing structures of meaning, to assess their impact on social relations and definitions of the human, and to assert governmental controls where economic, ethical, or political issues are raised."[89] *White Noise* offers the kind of cultural work and guidance that is necessary for Americans to heal and confront division. Characters like Denise and Jack show the power of integration, the power of assessment, and the power of asserting control over the technological chaos that surrounds them. Technology, after all, is not some Orwellian instrument for social destruction in *White Noise*, or at least not entirely. The novel ends with the potential dangers *and* promises of technology looming on the literal horizon, where the awesome "postmodern sunset" reflects either the toxins of Nyodene Derivative or the microorganisms engineered to save humanity.[90] But, as Jack points out, the ambivalent "spell" of technology is both "powerful and *storied*,"[91] casting a familiar, Modernist shroud of uncertainty. In other words, while technology might pose new threats to society, twenty-first

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86. Ibid, 52.

87. Ibid, 183.

88. Ibid, 81.

89. Martins, "*White Noise* and Everyday Technologies," 2005, 87.

90. DeLillo, *White Noise*, 1985, 216.

91. Ibid, 308, emphasis added.

century modernization merely represents the continuation of an old Modernist challenge: to reconcile the divisions of the world.

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Art Studio Supervision with or without Exposure: A Sample Survey of Implementation for Graduate Student Achievement at Altinbas University

By Adem Genç[*] & Ahmet Feyzi Korur[±]

To what extent we could enjoy and appreciate anything that is totally unfamiliar? Without any precedent whatsoever, no comprehension would be possible. Art students gravitate to images they enjoy and this enjoyment might be partly due to an innate and self–sustaining pleasure arising from viewing pictures. In the literature we find a number of research studying the effects of such conditions as novelty, familiarity and exposure on human perception, emotion, conscious or unconscious cognition, memory, learning and etc. This research aimed to study the effects of such conditions on the creativity of the students in a graduate painting studio setting where the students were asked to complete two different painting projects of the same or related subject, one with and the other without exposure to art historical examples. The results indicate that the works carried out without exposure to examples turn out to be more creative and original in a fundamental way than those realized after the exposure.

Introduction

Since the emergence of art academies in Europe going back to the 16th century,[1] painting studio teaching has involved observational studies, such as working from drawings, casts, and objects as well as live models. With the advancement of technology, the use of photographic/planographic print reproductions of works of art has also become an important part of art studio education at various levels to guide students to contemporary or historical examples according to their personal interests and needs in terms of subject, composition, style, or technique. One can make the argument that the so-called language of painting (technical narrative) cannot be acquired or learned solely from observing the world but from the works of painters, previous or recent, just as we learn our mother tongue(s) from our parents, elders or peers. The painterly information coded in and through the material process of making the work is there for the fellow painter to see, in a way to decipher.[2] Thus, it is not necessarily arrogant to claim that painters speak to other painters in a way that may be closed to non-painters including historians and philosophers of art. On the other hand,

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1. J. Elkins, *Why Art Cannot Be Taught* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
2. V. Desiderio, *Theseus: Vincent Desiderio on Art: Interview by Daniel Maidman* (Santa Monica, CA: Griffith Moon, 2018).

for painting studio instructors there exists the problem of encouraging the student to be creative and original in his/her path to be an artist, especially in today's global culture where very little remains that is not mediated through images.

The famous French philosopher Deleuze, when talking to a group of film students about the act of creating, says that there is no such thing as having an idea in general and then expressing it in medium of choice.[3] When one has an idea, it is already involved in a mode of expression specific to a discipline: it is in a painting, a movie, a novel or in a scientific formulation or theory. However, what happens, as another equally famous French philosopher and sociologist Baudrillard points out, when our world becomes a screen through technology where everything, every form of expression, every discipline in which thought used to occur turns into a stereotypical image, a sign of itself, a simulacrum. Today we see, we experience things, events, our inner and outer world not in their uniqueness but as types, as categories. For example, when we look at the landscape, we cannot help but see it as a genre of itself because we have seen it many times in postcards, movies, photographs, and photographic reproductions of genre paintings. In this sense, our eyes function like a built-in Photoshop/ photo-manipulation filter, a real-time kitschifying tool, as the great modernist art critic Greenberg would say, that colors our perception with ready-made, pre-digested effects or moods. "Even the 'creative' act replicates itself to become nothing more than the sign of its own operation - the true subject of a painter is no longer what he or she paints but the very fact that he or she paints. The painter paints the fact that he or she paints".[4] Thus, the postmodern "sense of déjà vu -- a cynical sense of having seen it all, epitomized by Roland Barthes's notion of the 'already read, seen, done, experienced,' which reduces it to the fragment of a discourse -- a bit of text that is a link in a chain of language, itself a dictionary of themes, as he says in S/Z"[5] and the postmodern strategy of putting "everything" in quotation marks to indicate an awareness of this precarious situation. In this sense, the concepts of originality, authenticity and novelty can be said to have become utterly problematic not only for painters but also for painting instructors, especially those who feel the urgency to "design" conditions in the studio that would promote "creativity", which in itself seems a contradiction in terms.

When teaching painting in graduate level programs, studio instructors sometimes provide their students with more than enough information, visual or otherwise, on topics related to the subject matter, technique, or style with the assumption that exposure to such information will benefit them. But there is a strong sense that art involves more than the visible world or the conscious mind,

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3. G. Deleuze, *Two Regime of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* (New York, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)/Foreign Agents, 2007), 312.

4. J. Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art* (New York, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2005), 91.

5. D. Kuspit, *The Semiotic Anti-Subject* (Artnet, 2000).

it most importantly involves and speaks of the unconscious depths of thought to be the reservoir for the universal (collective) as well as the particular (personal) elements of human experience. Stendhal thought that people needed a visible object that manifested an unconscious and normally invisible side to life. Perhaps, this is why modern art has come to be seen as a repository for these unconscious, invisible aspects of life. In art, the visible serves as the metaphor for the invisible, the factual for the imaginary. The great British painter William Blake underlines such notion of vision eloquently in his letter to Revd. Dr. Trusler:

> The nature of visionary fancy or imagination is very little known and the eternal nature and permanence of it's ever existent images is considered as less permanent by the seed of the things of vegetative and generative nature; Yet the oak dies as well as lettuce but the imaginative image returns by the seed of contemplative thoughts; the writings of the Prophets illustrate these conceptions of the visionary fancy by their various sublime and divine images as seen the Worlds of Vision.[6]

Today, artistic inspiration or idea is thought to come from anywhere: from daily life, a photograph, a movie, a book, the internet, a dream, God or Muses. Yet, as Deleuze reminds us, it is born not from without but within a medium of its own, which obviously is historically and culturaly conditioned. How does this kind of affinity effect creativity? Is it possible or even necessary to escape this human condition to be artistically creative? Are we not being conditioned to adhere left or right political opinions throughout our lives? What does it mean to have an authentic, let alone artistic or creative, experience especially in this post-everything world including the medium itself? In this sense the present study aimed (i) to investigate whether the exemplary visual material and information presented to the students effect their innovative and creative process in painting in a positive or negative sense; (ii) to determine to what extent the creative and innovative achievement of the student is based on his or her imaginative capacity (iii) to understand whether referring the students to examples from the history of art contributes to the creative process and development.

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6. W. Blake, "The Eternal World of Vision," in *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature* (ed.) Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1799/1965), 54.

Literature Review

What is Creativity?

Online Webster Thesaurus defines creativity as "the skill and imagination to create new things".[7] In fact, the terms "creative" and "imaginative" are often used interchangeably and imagination as a free play of ideas is important for even the most minimally creative thought.[8] Creative things are sometimes new combinations of old things, ideas, skills, knowledge, conceptual combinations of existing materials and sometimes radically novel things which may involve a radical transformation of a conceptual space. And a capacity like imagination is needed for such conceptual combination, transformation and formation in the strongest traditional sense of novelty and creativity which "endorses a creation ex nihilo thesis: Truly creative ideas come from nowhere".[9] Any cognitive state that functions to faithfully represent the information of some conceptual space, —a truth-bound cognitive state which could be a true belief, propositional or procedural knowledge, or a memory— is rarely sufficient for creative thinking, for novel conceptual combinations, transformations and formations. Creativity requires more flexible, imaginative ways of thinking, non-truth-bound states that do not aim objectivity, but play the role of cognitive manipulation unrestrained, in Kant's terms, by the understanding's concept. Creative thought and behavior (rich as in Bach's radically new music piece or minimal as in our basic understanding of metaphor) require cognitive manipulation of a conceptual space in non-truth-bound ways. This voluntary cognitive activity often interacts with biological, affective, motivational, inferential, and free associative capacities.

Novelty, Familiarity and Exposure: Divergent and Convergent Thinking

Novelty or lack of experience enhances Gestalt-like, global perception and the use of abstract categories which support the integration of new information into existing knowledge, whereas familiarity bolsters detail-oriented, local perception. "More abstract categories are broader, and, naturally, more inclusive. If one tries to integrate a new target and is uncertain about the kind of category that would best fit it, it would be functional to activate many broad categories. A

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7. Merriem Webster Thesaurus, https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/crea tivity.

8. D. Stokes, "The Role of Imagination in Creativity," in *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays* (ed.) Elliot Samuel Paul and Scott Barry Kaufman (New York: Oxord Universtiy Press, 2014) 158.

9. Ibid, 159.

global processing style and abstract thinking support this inclusion process".[10] "When people encounter novel events or are being primed with novelty, they tend to use broader mental categories, as compared to encountering familiar events…broadening of mental categories facilitates integration of novel information into preexisting knowledge schemas, making the novel information easier to understand".[11] There are also individual, situational, affective, developmental, and cultural influences that facilitate or impede local versus global ways of perception.[12] Förster and Higgins find that global processing fits a promotion focus on advancement, whereas local processing fits a prevention focus on security. While familiarity – which, as studies of processing speed have indicated, is faster than recollection[13] – facilitates subsequent mental processing, novelty inhibits it yielding to an increased activation in the brain, as has been shown by neuroimaging studies.[14] Although novelty and global perception seems to be inherent to creative processes and creativity can benefit from divergent (lateral) thinking, it could also inhibit creative performance when convergent thinking is required.

> A novelty prime may activate remote exemplars of certain categories, supportive of divergent thinking, by broadening mental categories. However, a novelty prime may inhibit people's focus on the given material because of too much broadening of mental categories, reducing the ability to deduce a correct option when prompted, and may thus be detrimental to convergent thinking.[15]
> Free production of variability through unfettered divergent thinking holds out the seductive promise of effortless creativity but runs the risk of generating only quasicreativity or pseudocreativity if it is not adapted to reality. Therefore, creative thinking seems to involve 2 components: generation of novelty (via divergent thinking) and evaluation of the novelty (via convergent thinking). In the area of convergent thinking, knowledge is of particular importance: It is a source of ideas, suggests pathways to solutions, and provides criteria of effectiveness and novelty. The way in which the 2 kinds of thinking work together can be understood in terms of thinking styles or of phases in the generation of creative products. In practical situations, divergent thinking without convergent thinking can cause a variety of

10. J. Förster, "Cognitive Consequences of Novelty and Familiarity: How Mere Exposure Influences Level of Construal," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 45, no. 2 (2009): 447.

11. M. Gillebaart, J. Förster, M. Rotteveel, and A. C. M. Jehle, "Unraveling Effects of Novelty on Creativity," *Creativity Research Journal* 25, no. 3 (2013): 280.

12. J. Förster and E. T. Higgins, "How Global Versus Local Perception Fits Regulatory Focus," *American Psychological Society* 16, no. 8 (2005): 631.

13. A. P. Yonelinas, "The Nature of Recollection and Familiarity: A Review of 30 Years of Research," *Journal of Memory and Language* 46, no. 3 (2002): 442.

14. R. Habib, "On The Relation Between Conceptual Priming, Neural Priming, And Novelty Assessment," *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 42 (2001): 187-195.

15. Gillebaart, Förster, Rotteveel, and Jehle, "Unraveling Effects of Novelty on Creativity," 2013, 281.

problems including reckless change. Nonetheless, care must be exercised by those who sing the praises of convergent thinking: Both too little and too much is bad for creativity.[16]

Methodology

The study consisted of two phases and five Art and Design graduate students who took a 16-week studio course called Utopia Workshop each of which with 56 unit/hours of attendance in the spring term of 2018-2019 academic year at The Institute of Social Science in Istanbul Altinbas University. All participants had priorly taken Art History, Mythology, Art Criticism and Basic Art Studio courses and were already working in sectors related to art or design alongside their graduate study.

In *Phase 1* the participants were asked to read the Illiad[17] completely, choose a section from 24 Books in which no actual battle scenes are described and then create a painting based on their interpretation of the section. After a short discussion and visual sketch work, they were asked to transfer their sketches directly to the canvas measured 97x162 cm and begin the painting process in color.

In *Phase 2*, the participants were asked to re-establish the composition in order to make the work more effective by creating a new frame for the second painting of the same dimensions that emphasizes the main motive, but this time drawing inspiration from examples in Western art and ancient Greek vase drawings depicting stories from the Iliad which were in the class followed by discussions on the practical and conceptual issues raised by them. Symposium papers and scientific articles related to the legendary conflict between the Early Greeks of the mainland and the settlers of the Anatolian peninsula dated some 1200 BC, and audiovisual sources such as motion graphic animation and musical video recordings of Fazıl Say (the Turkish musician and composer of Troy Sonata) were also used as auxiliary resources. The lectures and instructions at this stage also included discussion on the stylistic features of Ancient Greek art best observed in decorations on ancient Greek vases from Crete, Boeotia and several Greek islands, which introduced new and fertile subjects into the repertory of conventional Greek art including the depiction of the Trojan horse.[18] The students were also lectured on the elements, principles and dynamics of composition such as (a) creating tension through deformed shapes or proportions, (b) considering

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16. A. Cropley, "In Praise of Convergent Thinking," *Creativity Research Journal* 18, no. 3 (2006): 391.

17. Homer, *The Illiad* (New York: Harper Colins Publishers, 2015); "Outline of Homer's Illiad" by David Silverman, https://www.reed.edu/humanities/110Tech/Iliad.Outline.html.

18. J. Boardman, *Greek Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 65.

relations between figure and ground in the pictorial formation of the painting, (c) the human eye and color perception, color sensibility, dimensions of color, additive color space and subtractive mixture of color, spectral and pigment colors and color interaction, and (d) creating movement through light and shade reinforced by architectonic forms and devices. In terms of materials and techniques, students were encouraged to collaborate among themselves and get ideas from the instructor. The participants were asked to examine the story carefully that was essential to the subject to understand the main idea of the story and the visual/psychological relationships between the main characters in order to make the compositon more sophisticated.

During both phases, students were instructed on how to apply conventional painting methods and techniques widely available to artist throughout the ages were used. After an initial application of priming on the canvas, students transferred their compositions onto the picture plane followed by the subsequent application of color. Painting materials and supplies included cotton canvas fabric measured 110x175 cm. for each participant, 97x162 cm precision cut stretchers, staple gun, rabbit skin size glue and hand prepared gesso with zinc, white pigment and titanium white, primer for oil and acrylic, paint stick colors, varieties of acrylic and oil colors, acrylic airbrush inks, acrylic emulsion, acrylic retarder, drawing pencils, wax pastel and transparent medium, acrylic binder and varnishes. During the semester, participants were allowed three unexcused absences.

Works in Progress

Participant 1: Umut Yaşar Arpa, (Tatoo Artist, BA Painting, Ondokuz Mayıs University)

Phase I

Chosen section:
> Athene disguises herself as Hektor's brother Deïphobos, and so persuades Hektor to stop running away so that the two of them may face Hektor together. Hektor stops and addresses Achilleus, proposing that before fighting they should agree that the winner will treat the loser's body correctly. Achilleus refuses this deal and attacks. His first cast misses, but Athene retrieves the spear for him. Hektor's spear bounces off the shield of Achilleus, and after calling in vain on Deïphobos to provide another Hektor realizes how Athene has mislead him. Now Achilleus kills Hektor, boasts aloud of his intention to maltreat Hektor's body, and says that he will never ransom it back to Priam for proper funereal rites. The Achaians crowd around and stab the corpse, then Achilleus drags it back to the camp behind his chariot (Book 22, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman).

After reading the Book 22 of *The Iliad*, Arpa decided to make a general abstraction about the Olympus Gods System rather than depicting the event as described in the text. He imagined the composition as a game of chess. At the beginning, his work was concerned largely with the overall structure of abstract forms within the context of limited colour. In the second stage he displayed a greater simplicity and a dramatic introspection of calmness. He achieved a philosophic sense of nature in a few acrylic colour touches ranging from hues of ultramarine violet to tourquoise (Figures 1-6).

Figure 1. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in process, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (Session: The first week)*

Figure 2. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in process, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The second week)*

Figure 3. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in process, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The third week)*

Figure 4. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in process, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The fourth week)*

Figure 5. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in process. 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The sixth and seventh weeks)*

Figure 6. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, The Mourning of Priamos, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The last week)*

Phase II

Arpa started his first session of the second phase with stains on a dark background by using acrylic paint. In the subsequent sessions, he dealt with the metaphorical approach of the relevant chapter of Iliad. Detailed work on the sample elements turned into a depiction of surreal views. The study includes pictorial elements on the one hand and descriptive elements on the other. The participant's level of visual memory, ability to hold and reflect on what he sees or imagined is slightly higher than other participants.

Arpa obtained visual materials about his second work in a short time. During his studies, he consulted his instructor only partially concerning the vitality of composition, pictorial movement, color-form relations, opaque and volume colors, oil painting and acrylic painting techniques and visual perception. The work in the first phase was found to be more original and creative than the one in the second phase based on the following points: (i) consideration of the relations between the grounds of picture planes, (ii) organization of figurative elements to create a more dynamic compositon, (iii) a more frugal and risk-free approach to color preferences, (iv) attention to details and observation, (v) linear and b/w expressions i.e., traditional "chiaroscuro" technique (Figures 7-9).

Figure 7. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, Hector's Head and Body's Skin Were Peeled off Gradually, Work in process, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The first two weeks)[19]*

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19. Umut Yaşar Arpa has used Franz von Matsch's 1892 mural "The Triumph of Achilles" located at the palace of Achille in Cofu, Greece, as a reference for his Phase II to painting "Hector's Head and Body's Skin Were Peeled off Gradually".

Figure 8. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, Hector's Head and Body's Skin Were Peeled off Gradually, Work in process, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The third, the fouth and the fith weeks)*

Figure 9. *Umut Yaşar Arpa, Hector's Head and Body's Skin Were Peeled off Gradually, Work in process, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The sixth and the final weeks)*

Participant 2: Hayrettin Doğan, (BA Textile Design, Marmara University), Istanbul

Phase I

In the first consultation, the participant said that due to his lack of any prior experience in painting it was not possible for him to imagine the subject without being influenced by an example, which in this case was the statue of *Laocoon and His Sons*, and thus his painting was an attempt to portray the story of Lacoon and the snake who strangled him, in a colorful and utopian way (Figures 10-13).

Figure 10. *Hayrettin Doğan, The Tracian Orphic Laocoon, 2018, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The first and the second weeks)*
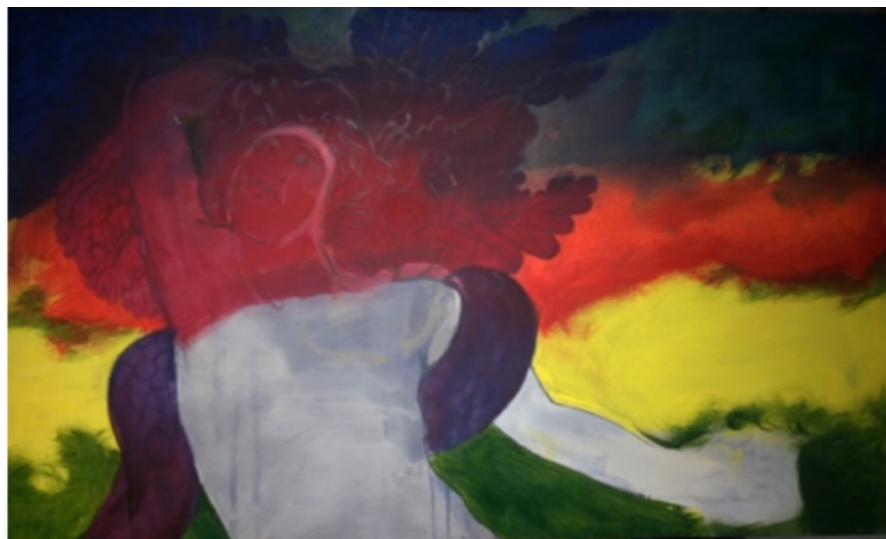
Figure 11. *Hayrettin Doğan, The Tracian Orphic Laocoon, 2018, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The third and the fourth weeks)*

Figure 12. *Hayrettin Doğan, The Tracian Orphic Laocoon, 2018, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The fourth and the fifth weeks)*

Figure 13. *Hayrettin Doğan, The Tracian Orphic Laocoon, 2018, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The sixth and the seventh weeks)*

Phase II

Chosen section:

> Patroklos forgets the warning given him by Achilleus, and pursues the Trojans across the plain up to the city walls. Apollo urges Hektor to attack Patroklos, but Patroklos continues his rampage, killing ten more men before Apollo himself finally knocks him down and takes away his armor. The dazed and defenceless Patroklos is wounded by a Trojan, Euphorbos, and Hektor comes in to finish him off. As he dies, Patroklos predicts the death of Hektor at the hands of Achilleus. (Book 16, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman)

Although the second painting is more realistic than the first one, it does not have as much originality. In this study, the participant copied fragments from the works made by old masters and arranged these fragments as collages (Figure 14). For a person who experienced neither oil nor acrylic painting techniques before and who made a painting in this dimension for the first time, both works can be accepted countable enough but we specify that the first painting included a more creative perspective than the second one in comparison respectively. In this study, the participant copied fragments from the works made by old masters and arranged these fragments as collages.

Figure 14. *Hayrettin Doğan, The Akha Valiants Fought to Prevent the Death of Patroklos, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm. (From first to seventh weeks)*

Participant 3: Yüsra Yavuz, BA Painting , Kütahya University

Phase I

Chosen section:

> Pandaros wounds Diomedes with an arrow, and Diomedes prays to Athene for help in killing him. She appears and reassures Diomedes, while also warning him not to attack any of the gods, except Aphrodite. Diomedes rages on, and many Trojans fall before his spear. Aineias meets Pandaros and asks why he is not shooting arrows at Diomedes; Pandaros replies that he is disgusted by his two grazing shots (at Menelaos and Diomedes) and wishes he had come to battle with a chariot and a spear (Book 5, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman).

To overcome some problems drawing the figure, participant Yavuz was advised to do sketches and studies on the arm and neck muscles in human anatomy. However, for personal reasons she could not complete the first phase

and the final result was an incomplete composition with abstract brush strokes (Figures 15-18).

Figure 15. *Yüsra Yavuz, Untitled, 2019, Oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The first week)*
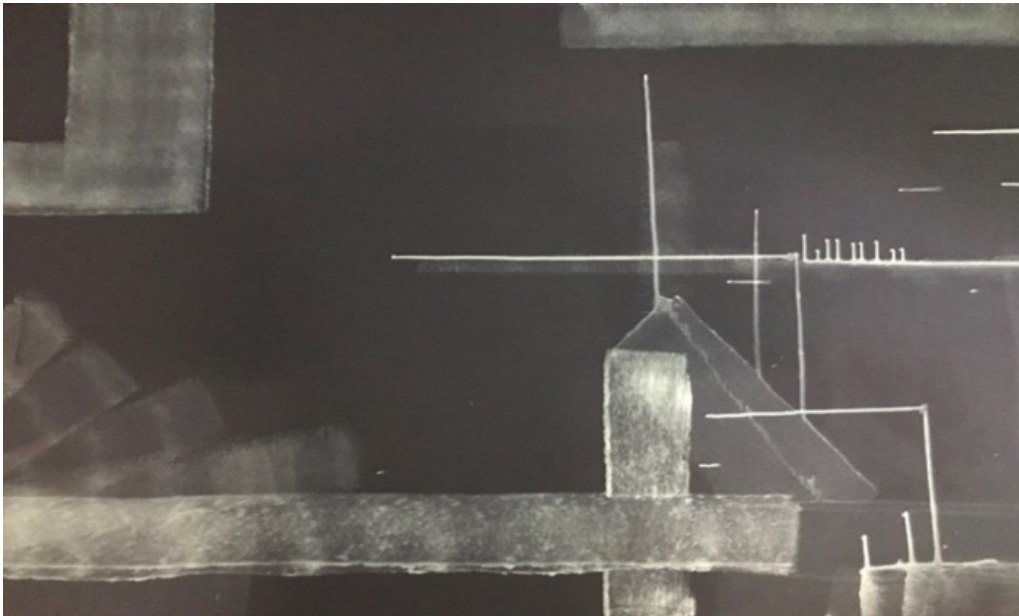
Figure 16. *Yüsra Yavuz, Untitled, 2019, Oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (Second week)*

Figure 17. *Yüsra Yavuz, Untitled, 2019, Oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (Third week)*

Figure 18. *YüsraYavuz, Untitled, 2019, Oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (Fourth week)*

Phase II

In her second painting, Yavuz was inspired by *Venus and Adonis* (1554) by Tiziano Vecellio- (106,7cm x133,4cm- Oil on canvas, Prodo Museum- Madrid) and *Orpheus and Aphrodite* by Edward John Poynter (1862, 112cm x 137cm, Oil on canvas, Houston Museum of Fine Arts). It can be said that the participant took a unique approach in terms of associating the figures with the background as well as the metamorphic images around them (Figure 19).

Figure 19. *Yüsra Yavuz, Aineias protecting her son from the crows, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm*

Participant 4: Faruk Yıldız, BA Fine Arts Teaching, Gazi University, Ankara

Phase I

Chosen section:

> Now Achilleus kills Hektor, boasts aloud of his intention to maltreat Hektor's body, and says that he will never ransom it back to Priam for proper funereal rites. The Achaians crowd around and stab the corpse, then Achilleus drags it back to the camp behind his chariot. The focus shifts to the city, where we get the mournful reactions of Priam, Hekabe, and Andromache. Andromache's worst fears, imagined in Book 6, have now come to pass; her lament is mostly about what a hard life now lies ahead for her fatherless son, Astyanax (Book 22, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman).

Faruk Yıldız continued his studies on a regular basis. He did research on the perspective problems of architectural structures, light and shadow, and especially on the phenomenon of cross light (oblique lighting) invented by Rembrandt (Figures 20-24).

Figure 20. *Faruk Yıldız, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The first 2 weeks)*

Figure 21. *Faruk Yıldız, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The third week)*

Figure 22. *Faruk Yıldız, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The fourth week)*

Figure 23. *Faruk Yıldız, The Mourning of Priamos, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The sixth week)*

Figure 24. *Faruk Yıldız, Mourning of Priamos, Final Work. 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The seventh and the final weeks)*

Phase II

Chosen section:

Apollo's priest Chryses comes to the Achaian camp and asks to ransom back his daughter Chryseis, who has been captured. Agamemnon sends him rudely away, and Chryses prays to Apollo to punish the Greeks, which Apollo does by sending a plague upon them. Achilleus calls an assembly to ask the seer Kalchas why Apollo is angry. First Kalchas secures Achilleus' promise that he will protect him from reprisals, then he explains the situation. Agamemnon angrily denounces Kalchas. Agamemnon agrees to give up Chryseis, who is his concubine, but demands some other "prize" to replace her. Achilleus answers that another prize will come later, when Troy is sacked. Agamemnon angrily threatens to take the captive woman of Achilleus or of another of the Achaian chiefs, and Achilleus responds to this slight by denouncing Agamemnon and threatening to go home to Phthia. Agamemnon repeats his threat to take Achilleus' prize, and Achilleus is about to draw his sword when Athene appears to him and stops him. Instead of attacking Agamemnon, Achilleus berates him some more, and swears an oath to stay out of the battle so that the Achaians can see how important he is. Nestor tries to reconcile the two chiefs, but without much success. Achilleus agrees to surrender his captive woman, Briseis, without a fight. When the messengers from Agamemnon arrive, Achilleus hands her over (Book 1, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman).

Faruk Yıldız exhibited a more sensitive and creative approach in his first painting than he did in his second painting in terms of composition (Figures 25-27).

Figure 25. *Faruk Yıldız, The Beginning of The End, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The first and the second weeks)*

Figure 26. *Faruk Yıldız, The Beginning of The End Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The third and the fourth weeks)*

Figure 27. *Faruk Yıldız. The Beginning of the End, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The fifth, sixth, and the seventh weeks)*

Participant 5: Özge Ünal, BA Ceramic, Hacettepe University, Ankara

Phase I

Chosen section:

> The two armies come together. Paris sees Menelaos and shrinks back into the ranks in fear, earning a bitter reproach from Hektor. Chastised, Paris proposes a single combat between himself and Menelaos. Hektor is pleased and conveys this proposal to the Greeks, whereupon Menelaos quickly accepts the challenge (Book 3, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman).

Özge Ünal had completed her undergraduate degree in ceramics without any experience in painting. The participant's courageous attitude and breakthrough in drawing and composition structure can be attributed to her lack of experience of drawing and painting (Figures 28-33).

Figure 28. *Özge Ünal, Paris and Menalous's Love That Caused 10 Years of War, 2019, Study on paper, 97 x 162 cm (The first week)*
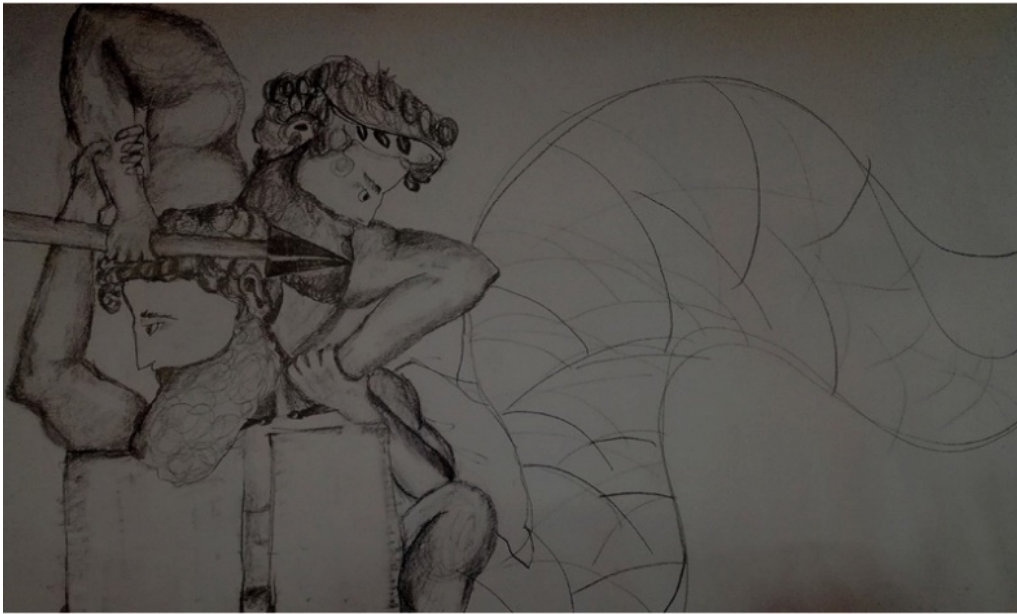
Figure 29. *Özge Ünal, Paris and Menalous's Love That Caused 10 Years of War, 2019, Study on paper, 97 x 162 cm (The second week)*

Figure 30. *Özge Ünal, Paris and Menalous's Love That Caused 10 Years of War, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The Third week)*

Figure 31. *Özge Ünal, Paris and Menalous's Love That Caused 10 Years of War, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The fourth and the fifth weeks)*

Figure 32. *Özge Ünal, Paris and Menalous's Love That Caused 10 Years of War, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The sixth week)*

Figure 33. *Özge Ünal, Paris and Menalous's Love That Caused 10 Years of War, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The seventh and final week)*

Phase II

Chosen section:

> The single combat is intended to end the war, and the winner is to have Helen. Paris draws the lot granting him first cast, but his spear does not pierce Menelaos' shield. Menelaos throws, but merely grazes Paris. Although Menelaos closes in to kill Paris with his sword, Aphrodite wraps Paris in a cloud and spirits him off the battlefield. Aphrodite goes to Helen and summons her to join Paris in the bedroom. At first Helen protests, but she cannot defy the goddess. Similarly, when confronting Paris in person she begins by reviling him and suggesting that he is a coward, but ends up in bed with him (Book 3, "Outline of The Iliad" by David Silverman).

The participant completed her work through almost making one-to-one copy of the bronze sculpture by Louis Leon Cugnot (1878, *Corybante Strangling Jupiter's Screams*, Musee de Picardie Amiens, France) without any original approach (Figures 34-36).
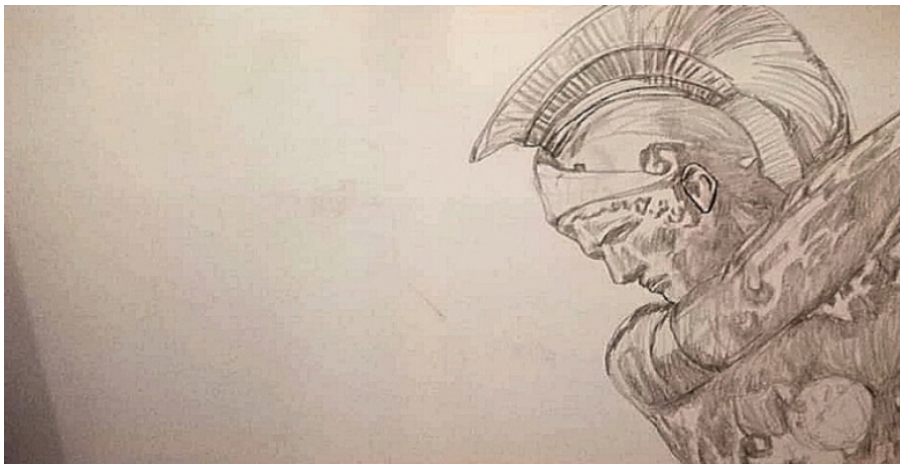
Figure 34. *Özge Ünal, Dreamed Of Escaping With Helen As The City Fell, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The first 2 weeks)*

Figure 35. *Özge Ünal, Dreamed Of Escaping With Helen As The City Fell, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The third and fourth weeks)*

Figure 36. *Özge Ünal, Dreamed of Escaping with Helen As The City Fell, Work in progress, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 97 x 162 cm (The fifth, sixth and seventh weeks)*

Results

Table 1. *Evaluation by the First Author/Course Instructor where the Study was conducted (With and without exposure)*

Participant #	The 1st Session: after 4 unit hours		The 2nd and 3rd Sessions: after 12 unit hours		The 4th and 5th Sessions: after 16 unit hours		The 6th and 7th Sessions: after 20 unit hours		Sub total
	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	
1	2	2	3	2	3	3	5	3	16 to 10
2	2	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	11 to 8
3	3	1	4	1	5	2	5	2	18 to 6
4	2	1	3	0	3	2	3	3	11 to 4
5	3	2	4	1	4	3	5	3	17 to 10
Total Points	**12**	**7**	**17**	**5**	**18**	**13**	**21**	**14**	**68 to 39**

Table 2. *Evaluation Points by the Three Faculty Members Working in the Same Institution where the Study was conducted (With and without Exposure)*

Participant #	The 1st Session: after 4 unit hours		The 2nd and 3rd Sessions: after 12 unit hours		The 4th and 5th Sessions: after 16 unit hours		The 6th and 7th Sessions: after 20 unit hours		Sub total
	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	
1	2	2	4	2	5	3	5	3	16 to 10
2	2	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	11 to 8
3	4	1	4	1	5	2	5	2	18 to 6
4	2	0	3	0	3	0	3	4	11 to 4
5	3	2	4	2	5	3	5	3	17 to 10
Total Points	13	6	18	6	21	11	21	15	73 to 38

Table 3. *Evaluation Points by the Second Author who is a Faculty Member/Painting Instructor at Another University (With and without Exposure)*

Participant #	The 1st Session: after 4 unit hours		The 2nd and 3rd Sessions: after 12 unit hours		The 4th and 5th Sessions: after 16 unit hours		The 6th and 7th Sessions: after 20 unit hours		Sub total
	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	w/o exp.	w/ exp.	
1	4	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	13 to 8
2	2	1	3	1	3	2	3	2	11 to 6
3	3	1	3	1	3	2	4	2	13 to 6
4	4	1	4	1	4	1	5	2	17 to 5
5	3	2	3	2	4	3	4	3	14 to 10
Total Points	16	7	16	7	17	10	19	11	68 to 35

The works completed in this study refered and were limited to a certain tradition of realism. Thus, we acknowledge that further research needs to be done referring to other traditions, especially related to modernist and contemporary works. In the first phase of the study, the students necessarily were depended upon their imagination, and were inspired by their personal dreams and visions, while in the second phase their works were clearly influenced by related previous art historical examples.

Different disciplines of art may require difffferent set of skills and experience. In this research, only two participants were painting graduates and thus the other participants may seem to have been disadvantaged. However, the study was not designed to measure the participant's competence in painting, but their creativity, innovativeness and originality. In the first phase of the study, the students had to rely more on their imagination and interpretation of the subject, thus were

inspired by their personal visions of the subject, while in the second part they were allowed to make use of previous examples. The paintings were evaluated by the course instructor (**Table 1**), three other faculty members (**Table 2**) and one faculty member/paiting instructor from another university (Table 3), grading from zero (0) to five (5). As can be seen from the tables works without exposure got a total of 209 points, while those with exposure got a total of 112 points. Thus, the works conducted without showing examples were unanimously evaluated to be more creative and original than those realized after exposure.

Discussion

The recent research in the field of Cognitive Science informs us that "most of our thought is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of cognitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too quickly to be focused on."[20] Most of our cognitive, mental structres and operations concerned with conceptual systems, meaning, inference, and language and aspects of sensorymotor systems such as visual and auditory processing, have been found to be unconscious. This means that all conscious thought, all our automatic cognitive operations, our implicit knowledge, our beliefs, our moral values, our plans, our actions, in short, all aspects of our experience are shaped and structured by "a hidden hand" of which we can have no direct conscious awareness. Arnheim, in *Art and Visual Perception*, also talks about the "hidden structure" of invisible, "psychological forces" active in the visual field   that determines the meaning of what we see.[21] Human mind largely (more than 95%) depends on this hidden realm underlying human perception and cognition, speaking to us through embodied, unconscious metaphors that define our unconscious metaphysics which is built into our ordinary conceptual systems. Our concepts, categories and thoughts are the result of our functioning in the world and their embodiment involve at least three levels: the neural level, phenomenological conscious experience, and the cognitive unconscious.

In *Maps of Meaning*, clinical psychologist Jordan B. Peterson talks about two different worlds: one which is experimental, described by the formal methods of science as a place of things and the other which is experiential, portrayed through the techniques of narrative as a forum for action and encountered in myth, literature and art.[22] The former is the objective world—what is, from the

20. G. Lakoff, and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 10.

21. R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: Universtiy of California Press, 1974).

22. J. Peterson, *Maps of Meaning* (New York, Routledge, 1999).

perspective of intersubjective perception —and the latter the world of value—what is and what should be, from the perspective of emotion. In our world of daily experience, people, objects and events are laden with emotion and meaning perceived as part of the world itself. For example, when a child reaching for a very expensive cristal vase sitting on the table gets scolled by the mother it ceases to be simply an object with certain physical attributes but becomes something that indicates a certain social or cultural status or something that is dangerous, at least when the mother is around. Thus, in our daily, common sense experience, things have this dual existence: they at the same time are objects and have meaning. Things are scary, people are disturbing, events are promising, and food is filling. The human mind is primarily concerned not with the objective world, but with meaning, that is, with what it implies for action, insofar as it is experienced in our inner, subjective world, connected with emotion and feeling. "We want to know things, not to know what they are, but to follow what they mean—to understand what they mean for our behavior."[23] In this sense, meaning is the subjective, biologically determined, socially constructed emotional relevance or motivating significance of experience. Even though we generally agree on things, we have personal and unique experiences. What we pursue—what we individually hope and desire—determines the meaning of our experience. Whether something is meaningful or not cannot be determined by simply examining its physical properties. We subjectively characterize, categorize, and interpret our environment according to two fixed dimensions of human experience (Chaos/order, known/unknown, nature/culture, familiar/alien, conscious/unconscious), and this is much more grounded than any objective characterization. And art in its own image transforms, intensifies and objectivizes this subjective experience through a synthesis the above mentioned dialectic.

Similarly, McGilchrist talks about two distinct worlds constructed by the two hemispheres of our divided brain. The most fundamental difference between the hemispheres lies in the type of attention they give to the world. The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world. Attention is the way in which we relate to the world and "It doesn't just dictate the nature of that relationship, but what it is that we come to have a relationship with."[24] In fact, while the left hemisphere specializes in a sort of piecemeal attention that helps us make use of the world, the right hemisphere subserves a broad, open attention that enables us to see ourselves connected to and empathize with whatever is other than ourselves.[25] Though these two kinds of attention are mutually incompatible, we need to be able to use them simultaneously. "There is evidence of left-hemisphere dominance

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23. Ibid, 3.

24. I. McGilchrist, *Ways of Attending: How our Devided Brain Constructs the World* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 13.

25. Ibid, 14.

for local, narrowly focused attention and right-hemisphere dominance for broad, global, and flexible attention."[26]

> it is the right hemisphere that has the capacity to distinguish specific examples within a category, rather than categories alone: it stores details to distinguish specific instances. The right hemisphere presents individual, unique instances of things and individual, familiar, objects, where the left hemisphere re-presents categories of things, and generic, non-specific objects. In keeping with this, the right hemisphere uses unique referents, where the left hemisphere uses non-unique referents. It is with the right hemisphere that we distinguish individuals of all kinds, places as well as faces. In fact, it is precisely its capacity for holistic processing that enables the right hemisphere to recognize individuals. Individuals are, after all, Gestalt wholes. Where the left hemisphere is more concerned with abstract categories and types, the right hemisphere is more concerned with the uniqueness and individuality of each existing thing or being.[27]

One of the most important findings in brain research is that "new experience of any kind – whether it be of music, or words, or real-life objects, or imaginary constructs – engages the right hemisphere. As soon as it starts to become familiar or routine, the right hemisphere is less engaged and eventually the 'information' becomes the concern of the left hemisphere only."[28] There are at least two different ways of knowing: the first one is the result of an encounter permitting a sense of the uniqueness of the other as in coming to know someone personally – which cannot be paraphrased or just handed on to someone else unchanged. "It resists general terms; it has to be experienced; and the knowledge depends on betweenness (an encounter). These are all, in fact, aspects of the world 'according to' the right hemisphere. This kind of knowledge derives from a coming together of one being or thing as a whole with another."[29] The second one involves another kind of knowledge that comes from putting things together from bits. It is the knowledge of what we call facts – which is "general, impersonal, fixed, certain and disengaged."[30] It is the only kind of knowledge permitted by science and concerns the public domain. However, we approach to a work of art like entering into relation with another living individual, though facts about it – its provenance, date, materials, size and etc. – can inform us. Thus, people still flock the art museums rather than be content with visiting their online versions. It is important to recognize that a work of art "does not symbolize emotional meaning, which would require that it be interpreted; it metaphorizes it – 'carries it over'

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26. McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Devided Brain and the Making of the Western World,* (London: Yale University Press, 2019), 39.

27. Ibid, 51.

28. Ibid, 94.

29. Ibid, 95.

30. Ibid, 96.

direct to our unconscious minds… it conveys them direct, so that it acts on us, and we respond to it, as in a human encounter."[31]

To know something in the first sense is "never fully to know it at all, since it will remain forever changing, evolving, revealing further aspects of itself – in this sense always new, though familiar, in the original sense of coming to belong among our chosen ones, those with whom we stand in close relation, our *familia* (in Latin literally our 'household')."[32] To know something in the second sense is to fix it in order to make it repeatable and repeated, that is, familiar in another sense: routine, inauthentic, lacking the spark of life. This kind of knowledge doesn't give a good idea of the whole, but a partial reconstruction of its aspects which doesn't change from person to person or from moment to moment, therefore making context irrelevant. It can be said that things are first apprehended by the right hemisphere while they remain new, while we are still getting to know them, but they are soon taken over by the left hemisphere, where they become familiar, in the sense that they are now known and therefore certain. At the neurological level, the new becomes old, that is, familiar through the left hemisphere representation of it. It becomes conceptualized rather than experienced.

> In almost every case what is new must first be present in the right hemisphere, before it can come into focus for the left. For one thing, the right hemisphere alone attends to the peripheral field of vision from which new experience tends to come; only the right hemisphere can direct attention to what comes to us from the edges of our awareness, regardless of side. Anything newly entering our experiential world instantly triggers a release of noradrenaline – mainly in the right hemisphere. Novel experience induces changes in the right hippocampus, but not the left. So it is no surprise that phenomenologically it is the right hemisphere that is attuned to the apprehension of anything new.
>
> This difference is pervasive across domains. Not just new experience, but the learning of new information or new skills also engages right hemisphere attention more than left, even if the information is verbal in nature. However, once the skills have become familiar through practice, they shift to being the concern of the left hemisphere, even for skills such as playing a musical instrument.
>
> If it is the right hemisphere that is vigilant for whatever it is that exists 'out there', it alone can bring us something other than what we already know. The left hemisphere deals with what it knows, and therefore prioritizes the expected – its process is predictive. It positively prefers what it knows. This makes it more efficient in routine situations where things are predictable, but less efficient than the right wherever the initial assumptions have to be revised, or when there is a need to distinguish old information from new material that may be consistent with it. Because the left hemisphere is drawn by its expectations, the right hemisphere outperforms the left whenever prediction is difficult. The link between the right hemisphere and what is new or emotionally engaging exists not just in humans, but already in higher

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31. Ibid, 96.
32. Ibid, 96.

mammals: for example, horses perceive new and possibly emotionally arousing stimuli with the left eye.[33]

Conclusion

As McLuhan argued, every technology is an extension of ourselves, of our organs, senses and functions, the last and most consequential of which is the externalization of our nervous system through digital technology.[34] Any extension of a human organ, sense or function accelerates and enlarges its previous scale resulting in the numbness or the self-amputation of that function because of the overload. It seems that through a technology based on digits we have mostly extended our left-brain, and forcing everything to be digital, our world has become totally left-brain dominated. Thus, McGilchrist believes that our attention to the world today is specifically and exclusively governed by the narrowly focused, target-driven left hemisphere of the brain, as if, we are globally suffering from a severe right brain stroke and we might ask the implications of this conclusion, if it is true, for creative disciplines. Is seems that through relentless digital globalization, every aspect of our world and culture has turned into an item in the dictionary of predetermined, predigested, abstracted, categorized, and historicized, meanings. In such a circular, closed off, left-brain dominated world where everything seems to refer to another just like in a dictionary, where everything is forced to be operational, transparent, accounted, quantified and categorized, and where the "other," that is nature, the unknown, the alien, the unconscious seems to be purged from our lives, the possibility of having a creative and authentic experience seem less and less possible, thus making the need to find ways to balance the two sides of the equation more urgent than ever, especially in learning environments. How to do it, requires further research on the subject.

Finally, Art students gravitate to images they enjoy and often influenced by what they have seen before when they paint. It can be assumed that these preferences or pleasure are based on an innate and self-sufficient pleasure in viewing pictures. But there is also an important component here that has been described in psychology as the "familiarity principle". The data obtained as a result of this study revealed that the paintings made without showing an example in creative art education exhibit a more original and individual approach than the ones made after showing the example.

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33. Ibid, 40.

34. M. McLuhan, *Understanding the Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

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Exploration of the Self in a Religious-Ethical Context from Late Antiquity through the Early Renaissance: St. Augustine, Boethius, and Petrarch - Past Ideas for our Future

By Albrecht Classen[*]

There are many efforts to defend the Humanities against countless attacks by university administrators, the public, and, implicitly, even by students. In light of those problems, this article returns to three of the most important intellectuals in the history of western culture, St. Augustine, Boethius, and Francesco Petrarch, examining their respective fundamental dialogic narratives in which they probed their own self and discovered answers to the most critical questions in life. This paper suggests that we can profoundly promote the Humanities by returning to the bedrock of our discipline established by these three authors whose concepts about the self and its relationship with the transcendental being (the divine, Summum bonum, etc.) continue to offer central perspective also for the twenty-first century.

Introduction

Research addressing the Middle Ages commonly faces a double-edged challenge, either having to handle utter ignorance and disregard on the part of the public, or being appropriated by the modern media industry and social groups recreating the past in a fanciful, light, and playful manner often far removed from historical reality – see the Society for Creative Anachronism or the countless attempts at medievalism by other groups, artists, film makers, composers, sculptors, novelists, or poets.[1]

The outcome tends to be, unfortunately, a high level of ambivalence, confusion, and misunderstandings, if not utter ignorance, and hence also of a dangerous tendency among relevant administrators or decision-makers to eliminate, whenever a possibility arises, positions for professors or researchers who used to teach medieval history, art history, philosophy, language, and literature. Of course, the Humanities in general struggle hard at the present time to maintain their academic status, often because they do not necessarily produce a

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1. See, for instance, Andrew Elliot, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media. Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017); Richard Utz, *Medievalism. A Manifesto* (York: ARC Humanities Press, 2017); *Studies in Medievalism* XXIX, ed. Karl Fugelso. Politics and Medievalism (Studies), 1 (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2020); *Studies in Medievalism* XXX, ed. Karl Fugelso. Politics and Medievalism (Studies), 2 (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2021). The number of relevant studies on this phenomenon is legion, which underscores the huge interest in the Middle Ages as a field of experimentation and leisure activities.

money stream flowing to the university, or because they do not have, at least allegedly, enough students who, after their graduation, find meaningful and well-paying jobs outside of academia. Moreover, the current student generation is increasingly less prepared than ever before to devote themselves to intensive and expansive readings of primary or secondary literature from earlier times. What is not being expressed in a Twitter mode, for instance, is easily dismissed as unpractical or too time-consuming, hence not worth the attention or energy of the learners. The internet is abuzz with comments about those issues, but immediate and pragmatic solutions do not seem to be available at the current moment.

Unfortunately, one of the additional consequences of this malaise has thus often been that students vote against a course or a field of study with their feet if it is not required, if it is not easy, and if it appears as challenging in intellectual terms, without having a direct bearing on future job opportunities. Just as in the discipline of classical or ancient languages and cultures, the examination of medieval literature is a demanding task, but anyone exposed to texts from that period would easily confirm, once access has been gained through translation, for instance, or the close study of the relevant language, that the critical engagement with the voices from the pre-modern period proves to be worth the effort for the personal growth of the individual today.[2]

We always need to determine undoubtedly the relevance of our subject fields over and over again, we need to demonstrate their relevance to our students, their parents, the administration, and the public, and we need to pursue ways to identify our field as significant in global and specific terms, if they are not critically important within the wider academic context or for society at large. But this is basically the task of all research areas which ultimately disappear altogether if they do not succeed in addressing those fundamental questions.[3] *Bildung* used to be of high value at large, whereas today education seems to be something that can be purchased and applied immediately in practical terms so

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2. See, for example, two of the most fundamental studies addressing this concern globally: Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Public Square Book Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London and New York: Penguin, 2012). Cf. also Frederick Luis Aldama, *Why the Humanities Matter: A Commonsense Approach* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008). Other relevant studies can be found both in English and in many other languages.

3. See, for instance, James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*. The William G. Bowen Series, 70 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); The Making of the Humanities, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn. The Modern Humanities, 3 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014); Theodore George, *The Responsibility to Understand: Hermeneutical Contours of Ethical Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020). The literature on this topic is, of course, legion; it concerns us all, and we must continue probing our own identities. In essence, that's what the Humanities are all about, drawing mostly from literature and other related media.

that the graduate of the university or a college can immediately start working and earning money. This would be what Friedrich Schiller called at his first university lecture in Jena on May 26, 1789, the "Brotgelehrte": "[N]icht bey seinen Gedankenschätzen sucht [der Brodgelehrte] seinen Lohn, seinen Lohn erwartet er von fremder Anerkennung, von Ehrenstellen, von Versorgung" (The bread-oriented scholar does not seek his reward in the treasures of his mind, but in the [shallow] recognition by others, in receiving honorable posts, in his income).[4]

The Current Goal

The purpose of this paper, however, is not to join a chorus of jeremiads, not to lament the allegedly global downfall of the Humanities, and not to worry about our future determined by doom and gloom. On the contrary, the intention is to identify or revisit three of the most important voices from late antiquity and then the early Renaissance as some of the most fundamental contributors to a deep intellectual discourse that continues until today, all sharing the ideals of internalized dialogues in which the self finds itself confronted by external forces and needs to learn how to comprehend and identify itself in its own properties and values. This philosophical, literary, and ethical quest constitutes to be one of the most essential features and challenges in human existence and can be found in many different cultures throughout time, such as in Greek and Roman classical times. Returning to those literary-philosophical documents serves intriguingly well as a critical reminder of who we really are, today, that is, the heirs of thousands of years of cultural, spiritual, and intellectual life, here seen exclusively through a western lens simply by default and not by intent, although the same phenomenon applies, of course, to all other cultures across the world.

Drawing our attention to monumental figures such as these three authors might prove to be a most important reminder that we all are, in fact, nothing but dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, as the Neo-Platonist scholastic writer Bernard of Chartres (d. 1124) had famously formulated.[5] We certainly see farther than

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4. For a useful introduction, summary of the lecture, and a historical-philosophical analysis, see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Was_hei%C3%9Ft_und_zu_welchem_Ende_ studiert_man_Universalgeschichte%3F. For the text in its original version itself, online, see https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Was_hei%C3%9Ft_und_zu_welchem_Ende_studiert_man_ Universalgeschichte%3F (both last accessed on October 25, 2022). Both Schiller and his famous statement have been discussed already from many different perspectives, which does not need to be summarized here.

5. For an exemplary study of this observation, see Hillel Levine, "'Dwarfs on the Shoulders of Giants': A Case Study in the Impact of Modernization on the Social Epistemology of Judaism," *Jewish Social Studies* 40.1 (1978): 63–72; he refers to the important book by Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (New York: Free Press, 1965); cf. also Søren Frank, *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants*

them in practical, technical, scientific, or medical terms, but they must be credited with having established the foundation of all of our current knowledge, understanding, and comprehension, focusing on ethics, morality, spirituality, and a philosophical approach to all aspects of life. I simply claim that they continue to have much to say to us because they already formulated fundamental insights of timeless value and can be recognized as extremely influential sources for cultural history ever since. The history of reception in their cases confirms the validity of the present attempt to recover what we have learned from them and to demonstrate the importance of their insights.

Returning to those giants is not a turn away from the present and the future, but a renewed effort to explore our basis and to rebuild who and where we are today. Stepping backward can certainly offer the great opportunity subsequently to step forward more energetically, with more insight, and with more understanding under our belt.[6] Retreating can thus mean a reassembly of our intellectual forces and drawing more effectively from our historical and cultural resources to address the future.[7]

There is nothing wrong with focusing on the present world when we examine humanistic issues; in fact, it is a crucial, absolutely necessary task because we exist in that world and must learn how to cope with it right now if we want to build the bridge to our own future. But exclusivity and a myopic approach in that regard could also entail that we ignore the traditional perspectives and find ourselves in the dangerous situation of talking about the imminent situation without understanding the roots and historical development that led to where we are today. The all-engaging gaze into the future might threaten to place us into a dangerous intellectual vacuum and removes us from the foundation of our ethics, morality, spirituality, and intellectual history. Racism, sexism, misogyny, nationalism, and many other phenomena as perceived

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(London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). In his *Metalogicon* from 1159, John of Salisbury attributed that statement to Bernard: "Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature." See also Richard William Southern, *Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952), 203. See also the excellent survey online at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standing_on_the_shoulders_of_giants#cite_note-OTSOG-6 (last accessed on July 13, 2022).

6. I have discussed this global aspect already at great length in "Introduction," *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), XV–XXIII; and in "Medieval Culture—An Introduction to a New Handbook," *Handbook of Medieval Culture: Fundamental Aspects and Conditions of the European Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. 3 vols. (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), vol. 1, 1–17.

7. See now, for instance, Willem B. Drees, *What are the Humanities for?: Human Humanities on the Value of Humanistic Inquiry* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

or recognized today are not at all simply the result of current conditions. Hence, only if we embrace a horizontal (presentism) and a vertical (pastism) perspective at the same time can we hope to gain a full understanding of the critical issues at stake and move forward in a constructive fashion.

Past Voices for our Self-Examination

These unique voices to be studied here are those by St. Augustine, Boethius, and Petrarch, who for a long time have certainly all been well researched, examined, and discussed in a multitude of different contexts and from many perspectives. They constitute, of course, among many others, the cornerstones of the huge building which we call the history of western culture and are hence very well known – the same phenomenon exists, of course, in other cultures as well. However, studying their works in conjunction with each other promises to address several fundamental issues also in the Humanities at large at the present moment, perhaps leading us out of the doldrums of negativity and a sense of disorientation within the academy.[8] To assume that premodern literature, or philosophy and religion, for instance, might have little to say to us is simply an expression of ignorance and a blatant denial of countless opportunities to grow in epistemological terms based on centuries and even millenniums of previous ideas, narratives, artworks, or teachings.[9]

First, comparing some of their texts with each other will allow us to recognize a specific type of discourse shared across the centuries, with Augustine having been the fundamental source for the two other authors and countless others, while he himself was certainly deeply influenced by his predecessors in antiquity as well, as to be expected in light of the constant concatenation of ideas passed on from one generation to the next. The Classics are undoubtedly a

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8. From a Nordistic, and yet globally valuable perspective, see Alexander van Nahl, "Medieval Scandinavian Studies—Whence, Whereto, Why," *Humanities* 11.70 (2022), online at: https://doi.org/; or https://mdpi-res.com/d_attachment/humanities/humanities-11-00070/article_deploy/humanities-11-00070.pdf?version=1653999456.
I myself have addressed this issues numerous times, see now Albrecht Classen, *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century: The Meaning and Relevance of Medieval and Modern Literature* (Chisinau, Moldova: Elvira Press, 2022); DOI: 10.3390/h11030070; cf. also id., "The Poetic Word as a Medium for Human Self-Discovery and Identity," *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 5.1 (2022), online at: https://journalofsocialsciences.org/vol5no1/the-poetic-word-as-a-medium-for-human-self-discovery-and-identity/.
9. G. R. Evans, *Fifty Key Medieval Thinkers* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002). See also the contributions to *Historical Understanding: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Zoltèn Boldizsár Simon and Lars Deile (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

natural ally of Medieval Studies, the latter deeply anchored in the former, and both, in unison, powerful enough to address universal concerns of a timeless nature, which had a huge impact on the following centuries.

Second, focusing on those three luminaries will empower us to present a very different image of the Middle Ages than the untrained audience might be used to or might expect to find in the first place. Whatever we might say regarding that age, there is no doubt that it was just as complex and diversified in cultural, philosophical, religious, or linguistic terms as is our own world, even if in a bit different configuration. Third, the study of those three voices in tandem with each other opens significant perspectives toward an intellectual dimension people might not associate the Middle Ages with and which scholars also do not tend to pursue because we often find ourselves too much in academic silos and do not perceive the many connections across the disciplines because philosophy and literature, for instance, have never been limited by so-called national boundaries. And finally, the analysis of those three intellectual giants can reveal the true extent to which we today find ourselves intellectually, spiritually, and culturally grounded in those sources in a myriad of ways.[10]

The quest for the own self, one's identity, and the search for values rooted in ethics and religion, in philosophy and aesthetics, has continued from the earliest Middle Ages until today, and this very quest constitutes not only an intellectual exercise but proves to be essential for the meaning of all of human life. Boethius, for instance, though deeply grounded in his own intellectual framework and addressing a late antique audience from the post-Roman period, uncovered insights into the true nature of people and the need to go on a quest for happiness as the fundamental concept of all human existence. The continuous history of reception of his work until the present, even if often ignored or neglected in the modern time, underscores the validity of certain ideas as they had been developed in the past. We could, of course, adduce many other thinkers and authors addressing the same issues pertaining to the meaning of our being here on earth. However, as we will observe, examining those three writers, Augustine, Boethius, and Petrarch, will significantly shed important light on the seminal nature of their insights and hence on the relevance of the medieval past for us today.

To be sure, the annals of medieval philosophy are filled with profound, meaningful, surprisingly relevant thinkers who have much to say also to us today regarding ethics, religion, identity, the meaning of the world, the afterlife,

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10. See, for instance, Robert McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, & Dante* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2006); Scott MacDonald, *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Kennedy, Rick, *A History of Reasonableness: Testimony and Authority in the Art of Thinking*. Rochester Studies in Philosophy, 5 [i.e. 6] (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2004).

freedom of will, etc.[11] But by selecting those three writers we find ourselves in the ideal situation of identifying a unified discourse extending over almost a thousand years, predicated on the same rhetorical and intellectual notion, that is, on the same quest for personal identity, on the concept of spirituality as superior to materiality, and on the idea that the individual can discover him/herself through introspection, reflection, and examination, especially with an intellectual guide at one's side.

As I have recently argued in a new paper, the search for the self via introspection emerged already in the twelfth century, as exemplified by the Spaniard Petrus Alfonsi, a converted Jew, in his *Dialogus contra Judaeos*, and by the Middle High German poet Hartmann von Aue, in his *Klagebüchlein*.[12] However, the truly significant documents concerning the self within the context of the transcendental dimension were produced already in late antiquity, which then exerted an enormous influence on the intellectuals throughout the following centuries. We should, of course, refer here to some of the seminal studies published by Ernst Robert Curtius or Erich Auerbach, who have already convincingly demonstrated the global connections between antiquity, the Middle Ages, and us today, but the present approach still deviates from their contributions and promises to bring to the table of the current discourse three interconnected voices from the past.[13]

We observe here the strategy of resorting to the mode of a fictionalized

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11. It would be impossible to provide here a critical overview of medieval philosophy, an entire academic discipline; see, however, the contributions to *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. John Marenbon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy between 500 and 1500*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund. Sec. ed. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2020); *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Richard Cross and J. T. Paasch. Routledge Philosophy Companions (New York and London: Routledge, 2021).

12. Albrecht Classen, "Exploration and Discovery of the Self in the Twelfth Century: Spanish/Latin and Middle High German Perspectives. Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus contra Iudaeos* and Hartmann von Aue's *Klagebüchlein*," to appear in *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*.

13. Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948; Leipzig and Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2022). For recent critical studies, see, for instance, Robert Stockhammer, "Weltliteratur e Medioevo: Auerbach e Ernst Robert Curtius," *Intersezioni* 37.3 (2017): 341–62; Jan-Dirk Müller, "Wiedergelesen. Ernst Robert Curtius: Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter (1948)," *Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 50.1–2 (2019): 160-68; Silva De Laude, "Il Medioevo secondo Ernst Robert Curtius e Aby Warburg," *Immagine e parola* 1 (2020), 45–69; Albrecht Classen, "Ernst Robert Curtius and the Topos of the Book. The Impact of an Idea on Modern Philological Research," *Leuvense Bijdragen* 87.1–2 (1998): 59–78. For a grand study by famous Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht about some of the most famous Romanists, see his *Vom Leben und Sterben der großen Romanisten: Karl Vossler, Ernst Robert Curtius, Leo Spitzer, Erich Auerbach, Werner Krauss*. Edition Akzente (Munich: Hanser, 2002).

dialogue particularly well in the cases of Petrarch and Boethius, but St. Augustine also utilized, in a way, that introspective approach, questioning himself and teaching thereby his audience through his conversations with God. This is not to claim that this triumvirate represents a unique, or the supreme unit of medieval thinkers beyond all other voices. But we can be certain that all three were of greatest influence on their contemporaries and their posterity. Moreover, by choosing these three writers as our witnesses, we can build an excellent epistemological bridge from late antiquity to the early Renaissance, with Petrarch actually revealing that he still belonged to some extent to the medieval culture while he already explored new options associated with late medieval and early modern humanism. Before I proceed, however, I must also admit that this issue to be addressed would be the topic of an entire monograph, whereas here I can only reflect on some small issues and draw important lines of connections as food for thought in the wider context of the Humanities today.

To return to the same metaphor as above, we are only dwarfs on the shoulders of giants and ought to respect them to the fullest degree, even though we can now see further in material or technical terms. The spiritual dimension, as profoundly examined by Augustine, Boethius, and then Petrarch, is still waiting for us, which reminds us once again of the supreme importance of the Humanities for the academy at large.

St. Augustine – Church Father, Philosopher, and Author

It would be tantamount to carrying owls to Athens if I were to reexamine the life and works of this major theologian (354–430), who set up, perhaps almost uniquely and single-handedly, the foundations for the medieval and subsequent worlds in his quest for God, for the reflections on the true properties of this existence and the next. The goal here cannot be to discuss this intellectual founding father extensively; instead, it is much more modest, as I will only investigate in a concentrated manner Augustine's fundamental effort to come to terms with his own self and to create the most important autobiography in the western world.

His *Confessions*, composed in the last few years of the fourth century, responded to a range of political and religious pressures, and they were also the outcome of his personal need to come to terms with himself, his life, his spirituality, and self-concept. As the English translator of the *Confessiones*, Henry Chadwick, comments, "The *Confessions* is more than a narrative of conversion. It is a work of rare sophistication and intricacy, in which the apparently simple autobiographical narrative often carries harmonics of deeper meaning. . . The very title carries a conscious double meaning, of confession as praise as well as of

confession as an acknowledgment of faults."[14]

Augustine's *Confessions* consists of thirteen books, which trace many aspects of his personal life, focusing, above all, on his discovery of his Christian faith (or move away from his Manichean concept) and the transformation of his self into a new person deeply devoted to God. While the details of this profound introspection do not concern us here, I will examine instead, through a few excerpts, the major thrust and purpose of this monumental work which was created at the end of Roman antiquity and influenced countless generations ever since. The fact by itself that he endeavored to reflect on his own inner self within the framework of his external life strongly suggests the emergence of the individual probing itself and a critical fashion. Of course, the *Confessions* constitute one of the pillars of Christian theology, but we can be content here with reading it as a crucial beginning of autobiographical writing in which the author examines his own progress through life, outlining the many troubles, conflicts, worries, tragedies, realizations, and developments in material and spiritual terms.[15]

Already the first line of book 2 – book 1 is mostly devoted to his search for God – signals the major impetus of this work, discovering a pathway toward the own soul and its stirrings: "I intend to remind myself of my past foulnesses and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God" (24). Of course, Augustine names his own moral and spiritual shortcomings, above all, and lays bare his inner struggles, fears, insecurities, failures, desires, and dreams: "But I in my misery seethed and followed the driving force of my impuslses, abandoning you [God]" (25). Of course, throughout his entire work, Augustine consistently refers to God to whom he feels obligated and yet often seems to be far removed from, contrasting his worldly sinfulness with the ideals of true devotion to God.

Most importantly, Augustine outlined a clear division between his external life and his heart, projecting thereby a most significant interiorization and hence the clear awareness of individuality: "Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart" (29). At the same time, maintaining the ultimate purpose of this book of self-reflections, this heart is mirrored in the higher being: "You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss" (25). But we would mistake Augustine if we read his *Confessions* only in religious terms. Instead, he clearly acknowledges

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14. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. with an intro. and notes by Henry Chadwick. Oxford World's Classics (1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press,1992; reissued 1998 and 2008), ix.

15. See, for instance, Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*. Reprint edition (1967; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); James J. O'Donnell, "An Introduction to Augustine's Confessions," online at: https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/intro conf.html (last accessed on July 14, 2022); for an excellent summary, discussion, and scholarly apparatus, see Annemaré Kotzé, "Confessions," *The Literary Encyclopedia*. First published 26 March 2012; online at: https://www.litencyc.com/php/sworks.php?rec= true&UID=5912 (last accessed on July 14, 2022).

the presence and even beauty of the external world: "The life which we live in this world has its attractiveness because of a certain measure in its beauty and its harmony with all these inferior objects that are beautiful" (29). Logically, he refers to the beauty and value of friendship and love that bond people together, which thus set the tone for a continuous discourse on this emotional experience of which we are the heirs until today.[16] Augustine would not be Augustine if he did not associate many of the internal drives we have as people with sin, which thus leads him to appeal to God on a regular basis to help this human creature so easily subject to evil: "So the soul fornicates when it is turned away from you and seeks outside you the pure and clear intentions which are not to be found except by returning to you" (32). The sinfulness, however, translates into evil acts in one's life, so reflecting on his existence in material and spiritual terms, Augustine conceives of a highly complex relationship between the individual and the Godhead, between the interior and the exterior. Moreover, while discussing his own sinful act committed in conjunction with some of his friends, the author also observes the important role which society plays because the individual is never completely alone and easily becomes a victim of social pressures. The autobiography thus widens the perspective and correlates the personal, inner drives with the material life on the outside to which the soul has to respond on a daily basis: "As soon as the words are spoken 'Let us go and do it', one is ashamed not to be shameless (34).

Although Augustine's discourse seems to be a monologue, there is an imminent conversation with God to whom he appeals for help and with whom he engages the whole time: "My God, how I burned, how I burned with longing to leave earthly things and fly back to you. I did not know what you were doing with me (39). From stage to stage in his life, Augustine encountered ever new people and had to face their own characteristic features, strengths, and weaknesses, such as during his period of studying: "That explains why I fell in with men proud of their slick talk, very earthly-minded and loquacious. In their mouths were the devil's traps and a birdlime compounded of a mixture of the syllables of your name" (40).

Nevertheless, we observe him progressing, despite many fallbacks and shortcomings, often realizing, at least in his later years when he composed the

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16. See the contributions to *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Explorations of a Fundamental Ethical Discourse*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 6 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010); De amicitia: Friendship and Social Networks in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, ed. Katariina Mustakallio. Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae, 36 (Rome: Inst. Romanum Finlandiae, 2010); Jacob McDonie, *Friendship and Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The Linguistic Performance of Intimacy from Cicero to Aelred* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020); *Vera Amicitia: Classical Notions of Friendship in Renaissance Thought and Culture*, ed. Matthias Roickand Patrizia Piredda. Court Cultures of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 10 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022).

Confessions, the difficulties of reaching out to God and to learn what his personal relationship with Him would constitute (43). In the course of his self-reflections, Augustine also explores profound intellectual, ethical, moral, and philosophical aspects and transforms hence his writing process into a learning process: "I also did not know that true inward justice which judges not by custom but by the most righteous law of almighty God" (44).

A major portion of Augustine's *Confessions* is focused on the question regarding the nature of evil and God's justice, which humans have a hard time understanding because it is beyond their comprehension. The writer's reflections thus go back and forth between his personal stance regarding the situation in this world and in the other and then the position taken by God, as much as he might be able to grasp it. However, Augustine composed his *Confessions* from the perspective of an older man who looks back to his youth and shudders at the ignorance and foolishness he was guilty of then: "I was ignorant of these principles and laughed at your holy servants and prophets. By my mockery I only achieved the result that I became ridiculous to you" (48). Although there is no direct partner to whom he might address his reflections, it is obviously God to him he turns all of his attention, admitting his shortcomings in his early years: "I confess to you Lord that to the best of my memory (and it is a matter which I have frequently discussed) I was more moved by your answer through my vigilant mother than by the dream itself" (50). In other words, we clearly recognize a two-pronged approach, first talking to himself, and then addressing God Himself. This is not to say that Augustine completely ignored his later audience, but he created through his discourse a new intellectual platform for the exploration of his inner thoughts, his memories, his concerns and fears, his aspirations and dreams. The more he engaged with both himself and with God, the more he succeeded in establishing a narrative interiority, which then set the tone for his posterity throughout the Middle Ages and also the early modern age. Little wonder that famous Georg Misch engaged with Augustine's text in his seminal study on this genre.[17]

Most significantly, for Augustine, there was a deep shame about his earlier errors in religious terms, having been misled by the Manicheans. But he also urged his audience not to ridicule him for that; while he had already gone through a painful process of suffering and subsequent healing, others, mightier and wealthier than him, would still run into that problem:

Proud people may laugh at me. As yet they have not themselves been prostrated and brought low for their soul's health by you, my God. But I shall

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17. Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*. 4 Vols. (in 8 sub-volumes). 4th ed. (1907–1969; Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976); cf. also Albrecht Classen, *Autobiographische Lyrik des europäischen Spätmittelalters. Studien zu Hugo von Montfort, Oswald von Wolkenstein, Antonio Pucci, Charles d'Orléans, Thomas Hoccleve, Michel Beheim, Hans Rosenplüt und Alfonso Alvarez de Villasandino*. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 91 (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, 1991).

nevertheless confess to you my shame, since it is for your praise" (52). In this regard, the autobiography transforms into a narrative mirror for other people to reflect on their own lives and to accept Augustine's experiences and revelations as lessons for themselves.

The *Confessions* truly turn out to be a literary avenue for Augustine to trace his path from ignorant youth to mature adulthood, from the false belief of the Manichean to the Catholics, and the interior monologue often assumes a dramatic character with indirect dialogues with his friend, for instance, who then died after he had been baptized while in a coma, Movingly, Augustine relates how his friend had seemingly recovered, had then rejected him in his old and hence wrong faith, and then suddenly died after all: "My eyes looked for him everywhere, and he was not there. I hated everything because they did not have him, nor could they now tell me 'look, he is on the way', as used to be the case when he was alive and absent from me" (57). We are hence presented with varied perspectives and dialogic encounters, which transform the autobiographical account into a double-sided mirror.

On the one hand, Augustine manages to look at himself, on the other, the audience is invited to follow the narrative development. through the interior space of the author's reflections. However, there always lurks the dialogic strategy throughout the text because Augustine addressed God directly and appealed for help and inspiration: "Now, Lord, all that belongs to the past, and with time my wound is less painful Can I hear from you who are the truth, and move the ear of my heart close to your mouth, so that you can explain to me why weeping is a relief to us when unhappy?" (58).

Indeed, the key strategy pursued by Augustine consists of drawing from the generic elements of the autobiography and memoirs but engaging consistently with God in an implicit dialogue: "Look into my heart, my God, look within. See this, as I remember it, my hope; for you cleanse me from these flawed emotions. You direct my eyes towards you and 'rescue my feet from the trap" (59). All of his personal memories and reflections thus establish the narrative platform to enter into a conversation with God and thus to regain his own soul embraced by God. Despite the seeming monologic performance, the *Confessions* thus prove to be dialogic after all, which laid the foundation for all subsequent literary and philosophical works throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, whether we think of Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus Clericalis* (ca. 1160), Hartmann von Aue's *Klagebüchlein* (ca. 1170), Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum* (ca. 1220), or the anonymous *Gesta Romanorum* (ca. 1330).[18]

Within that framework, however, Augustine embedded, which made his

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18. See now the contributions to *Knowledge in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund. The Philosophy of Knowledge, 2 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); cf. also Berthold Wald, *Substantialität und Personalität: Philosophie der Person in Antike und Mittelalter* (Paderborn: mentis, 2005).

work so famous, an almost infinite flow of concepts of ethical, moral, religious, and philosophical kind, such as his exploration of friendship and love and the great need for the human being to pursue mercy, trust, love, and other values (61). At this point, Augustine turns to the truly crucial component of his entire memoirs, the warning about the tempting danger of the material objects in our lives that hold the soul prisoner and mislead it completely to trust the "transient things": "For these things pass along the path of things that move towards non-existence. They rend the soul with pestilential desires; for the soul loves to be in them and take its repose among the objects of its love. But in these things, there is no point of rest: they lack permanence" (62). And from here, Augustine examines many of the false concepts people embrace, such as vanity (62), disorientation in this life and the need to turn to God (63), the quest for happiness (64), false judgments (65), the imprisonment in the corporeal world (67), pride and instability of the character (68), lust (70), and so forth. All those personal shortcomings happened in his youth, and he felt deeply lost in the course of it, as he then expresses it most movingly: "But what good did this do for me? I thought that you, Lord God and Truth, were like a luminous body of immense size and myself a bit of that body" (68). While he achieved the highest accolades as scholar, rhetorician, and teacher, he really had lost or had not even found yet, the true path toward God (71). Consequently, the *Confessions* aim for personal liberation, for the grace of God, and for the gift of the true faith: "Protect us and bear us up. It is you who will carry us; you will bear us up from our infancy until old age" (71).

Revealingly, Augustine calls his own mind "vagabond" (77), indicating thereby his feeling of loss and disorientation in the spiritual world, and his deep desire for enlightenment and understanding. But he had to wait many years, as the personal reflections indicate, so the *Confessions* basically served him as a platform to reflect on his material and spiritual development. Neither eloquence nor rusticity of expression would be a guarantee to discover truth: "Wisdom and foolishness are like food that is nourishing or useless. Whether the words are ornate or not does not decide the issue" (78). Consequently, it would be erroneous to take even this treatise as a pilot light in the human quest for spiritual uplifting because each individual would have to determine his/her own way and mode of life.

Nevertheless, the famous author took it upon himself in a monumental fashion to reflect upon the many different forces influencing his life, to trace the many moves back and forth, to identify the workings of God in his existence, and to probe and challenge himself through the autobiographical examination. The term 'confession' appears as rather shorthand for a much larger literary enterprise, that is, to investigate the meaning of his life and that of his fellow citizens and to open the perspective from the individual to the Godhead. Accordingly, when we turn to the conclusion, Augustine gives ultimate praise to the creator because "we see the things you have made because they are. But they

are because you see them. We see outwardly that they are, and inwardly that they are good. But you saw them made when you saw that it was right to make them" (304). We could call this masterpiece hence an internal dialogue with himself and God, which set the standards for all future theological, personal, spiritual, and philosophical quests.

The Consolation of Philosophy: Boethius

This then allows us to turn to the most influential late antique or early medieval philosopher, Boethius (d. ca. 525), who was the crucial steppingstone from one cultural period to the next. Boethius was highly praised as the 'schoolmaster of the West,' as the initiator of western reception of Greek classical knowledge (Aristotle), and as the most impactful thinker of his generation. The circumstances of his premature death, caused by stoning in a Pavia prison due to the charge of alleged state treason (certainly fabricated) remain obscure and do not need to be investigated here. However, shortly before his execution, he utilized his remaining time meaningfully and composed the monumental treatise *De consolatione philosophiae* (ca. 524), which pursues different goals than Augustine's *Confessiones*, but in essence continued with the same quest of discovering the meaning of happiness and the purpose of one's life.

His remains were entombed in the church of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia, also the resting place of Augustine of Hippo, perhaps as a hint at their intellectual fellowship. Throughout the centuries, medieval and early modern authors responded to Boethius, either by adopting his philosophical stance or by giving him extraordinary praise. In Dante's *Divina Commedia*, *Paradiso*, Canto X, lines 121–29, for instance, Boethius's spirit is pointed out by Saint Thomas Aquinas,[19] and we easily discover a continuous stream of Boethius enthusiasts, whether we think of Geoffrey Chaucer, Lorenzo Valla, Sebastian Brant, Queen Elizabeth I, or Shakespeare.[20] In simple terms, Boethian thinking has had a huge

19. Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); John Marenbon, *Boethius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Adrian Papahagi, *Boethiana Mediaevalia – A Collection of Studies on the Early Medieval Fortune of Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy* (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2010); Joachim Gruber, *Kommentar zu Boethius, "De consolatione philosophiae"*. Texte und Kommentare, 6. 2nd expanded ed. (1978; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); see also *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Part II. For the latest edition of the *Consolatio*, see Daniela Mairhofer and Agata Mazurek, *Der "Oxforder Boethius": Studie und lateinisch-deutsche Edition*. Texte des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, 58 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2020).

20. *Vernacular Traditions of Boethius's* De Consolatione philosophiae, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips. Research in Medieval Culture (Kalamazoo, MI:

impact on the medieval and also modern world in literary, religious, and philosophical terms.[21]

While Augustine elaborated on his internal struggle through an autobiographical narrative, Boethius resorted to the dialogue between his own fictional persona and the allegorical figure of Philosophy who arrives at his darkest hour in prison and engages him in a didactic conversation about the meaning of human life and personal happiness.[22] In essence, Philosophy teaches him that most aspects of our earthly existence are determined by contingency and hence cannot be trusted. Or, we are controlled to a large extent by Fortune and are subject to its constantly moving wheel. Hence, no earthly joys or material profits can be trusted since they are only loans to us and can be taken away at any moment's notice. Understanding the true property of this phenomenon constitutes already a major step forward toward one's healing, or learning process, aiming for one's independence, happiness, self-sufficiency, or unity with the absolute good, the *summum bonum*. In essence, Philosophy calls out all those values that seemingly make people happy, whether power, money, health, fame, love, family, and respect as nothing but illusions or mediums for self-deception. In essence, none of those aspects can be trusted, and in the end, only the realization of the workings of Fortune would achieve the desired effect, freeing us from that ever-turning wheel of Fortune and gaining a liberty that rests exclusively in the absolute good, in happiness.

One of the most curious moments occurs when Philosophy reminds Boethius that misfortune actually carries a positive value for the individual because it provides insight into truth. Referring to friendship, she tells her disciple, the prisoner and death-row inmate, that true friends prove themselves only in times of danger or sickness. Only true friends stick it out with each other and thus demonstrate profound strength. False friends immediately fall away and can never be trusted: "adverse fortune is more beneficial to men than prosperous fortune. When Fortune seems kind, and seems to promise happiness,

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Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2016); Albrecht Classen, "Boethius and No End in Sight: The Impact of *De consolatione philosophiae* on Early Modern German Literature From the Fifteenth Through the Seventeenth Century: Andreas Gryphius and Johann Scheffler (Angelus Silesius)," *Daphnis* 46 (2018): 448–66 (online at: doi 10.1163/18796583-04601010).

21. *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, ed. Margaret Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981); see also the contributions to *Boethius Christianus?: Transformationen der "Consolatio Philosophiae" in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Reinhold F. Glei, Nicola Kaminski, and Franz Lebsanft (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

22. There are many editions and translations of Boethius's text; here I rely on Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans., with intro. and notes by Richard Green (Indianapolis, New York, and Kansas City: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1962); for further reflections on this text, see Joel C. Relihan, *The Prisoner's Philosophy: Life and Death in Boethius's* Consolation (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

she lies. On the other hand, when she shows herself unstable and changeable, she is truthful. . . . Finally, good fortune seduces weak men away from the true good through flattery; but misfortune often turns them around and forcibly leads them back to the true good" (40). Instead of lamenting his terrible destiny, Boethius ought to feel thankful: "Now you complain of lost riches; but you have found your friends, and that is the most precious kind of wealth" (41).

Once all the material dimensions have been moved aside, Philosophy takes the second step and reminds Boethius of the ultimate source of happiness, the only one that can be trusted, that is, the only force that is not dependent on Fortune and enjoys its own sustenance from itself. The author might have the Christian teaching in mind, or he might aim for a purely Neoplatonic interpretation according to which the origin of all life finds its resting place in the one force behind all material existence, the good. The good is defined as the happy, which in turn proves to be the one entity that draws only from its own being and is not in need of anything outside of itself. This could be thought of as God, or as self-sufficiency as such. True happiness, hence, does not rest in material, worldly goods, but in the deep source of it all from which all life originated. Only this freedom would guarantee contentment, or freedom, which in turn leads to true happiness: "the good is defined as that which, once it is attained, relieves man of all further desires. This is the supreme good and contains within itself all other lesser goods" (43).

Boethius also raises the question of whether there is free will, or whether we are dependent on God's decisions. Philosophy knows how to respond and determines that God exists both in the past and in the present at the same time. God would thus not "know" the future in a visionary manner but would be there with the individual during all three stages of time, past, present, and future: "if you will think about the foreknowledge by which God distinguishes all things, you will rightly consider it to be not a foreknowledge of future events, but knowledge of a never changing present. For this reason, divine knowledge is called providence, rather than prevision, because it resides above all inferior things and looks out on all things from their summit" (116). And: "this power of divine knowledge, comprehending all things as present before it, itself constitutes the measure of all things and is in no way dependent on things that happen later" (119).

Although Boethius, in his role as a prisoner and student of Philosophy's teaching, is willing and ready to accept the lessons, which all sound reasonable and prove to be logical by themselves, he still has deep troubles comprehending why then he, as a truly good person, innocent of all those trumped-up charges, has to suffer from the doings of those evil people who can only think of how to bring about his demise. This then leads over to the fundamental discussion pertaining to the role of good and evil, and why there is so much evil in this world. Boethius is willing, as he formulates it in books three and four, to accept the basic explanation about the fake properties of Fortune, or that Fortune itself is

defined by its own fickleness or constant change. And yet, he struggles hard, as all people certainly do who reflect upon those issues, to comprehend the larger schema of things, i.e., the relationship between the human creature and the divine being.

How then would evil enter this world, and Philosophy offers the stunning argument that there is no real evil, as much as there seem to be evil people who have apprehended Boethius and thrown him into prison despite his clear innocence. Only slowly, and with much resistance, does the author finally realize what Philosophy is trying to tell him when she resorts to the astounding metaphor of the plants that all want to live and thrive. Evil, if it were to exist, would be a force in all living things driving them to a sort of suicide insofar as plants, for instance, would deliberately seek out dark, dry, cold, and rocky places where no real life is possible: "Thus, this love for the self clearly comes from natural instinct and not from voluntary activity. Providence gave to his creatures this great urge for survival so that they would desire to live as long as they naturally could" (68). However, those are then plants that remove themselves from the potentials of full existence and return, voluntarily, so to speak to their own origin, or simply commit suicide, if they had a will on their own. Pursuing evil in human terms would then be tantamount to submit completely under Fortune and to seek out willingly a miserable death where death would await them.

By contrast, all beingfos desire to be good, which now means, as we can conclude altogether, to aspire for independence, freedom from contingency, the gaining of self-sufficiency, and to join the supreme good as the only viable purpose for life: "whatever loses its goodness ceases to be. Thus wicked men cease to be what they were; but the appearance of their human bodies, which they keep, shows that they once were men. To give oneself to evil, therefore, is to lose one's human nature" (82).[23]

But why are there, then, evil people still around if that goal were so easy to perceive? Why does Boethius have to suffer such a terrible death, as he bitterly complains to Philosophy? Should not all people be able to listen to their own inner drive toward happiness and embrace it fully, abstaining from committing acts of evil? Stunningly, Philosophy then suggests that there is no real evil, and as much as poor Boethius has to accept his unjustified death, he should not even think that is a miserable victim of malfeasance or vicious plotting against him.

In fact, already in the first book, Philosophy had reminded him that his entire life had been a happy one, that he had achieved much both in intellectual and personal terms, witnessing, for instance, the rise of both of his sons to the rank of Consul. She also refers him to the fact that he is happily married, enjoys the deep friendship and love of his father-in-law, and that he should be proud of

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23. Robert Sharples, "Fate, Prescience and Free Will," *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 207–27.

his many accomplishments throughout his life.

She acknowledges that his imminent murder would have to be lamented, but she chastises Boethius for his shortsightedness, his demand on life that it would always be good to him. The wheel of Fortune constantly turns, so he should not complain so badly about this one time, though deadly, change in his life. Moreover, as we learn from the later books, there is no reason to fear evil because it does not really exist. The argument for this curious thesis is actually quite simple. Insofar as happiness is identified with goodness, and the latter with self-sufficiency, it is obvious that only the absolute good, maybe God, can be truly happy. All beings, however, strive for happiness, endeavor to extricate themselves from the dependency on Fortune, to gain this powerful notion of inner freedom from Fortune. The wicked ones, however, strive for the very opposite of their own nature: "what greater weakness is there than the blindness of ignorance? . . . they are made weak by intemperance and cannot overcome their vices . . . Anyone acting that way loses not only his strength but his very being, since to forsake the common goal of all existence is to forsake existence itself" (79).

In his Neoplatonic thinking, Boethius argues that all life is determined by the strife to free oneself from material existence, or from contingency where everything depends on Fortune. Once the individual has moved beyond that realm and entered the sphere of the absolute good, at least trying to participate in that good, then a sense of real happiness can be experienced. All of life is defined as a movement from birth to death, and within that short span the individual, or any creature, aims for the realization of its own potential. To become oneself constitutes the fulfillment of the own destiny, which can only aim for the good. However, those who do acts of evil, who exist at least in this material domain, move deliberately away from this natural vector toward the good and thus turn against themselves. In short, the more evil-natured an individual proves to be, the less it can really claim to be or to participate in goodness, or self-sufficiency. Hence, in the end, evil eliminates itself. Even though Boethius has to suffer at the hand of evil people, Philosophy consoles him with references to this course of all life, toward happiness. In other words, those who submit themselves to evil move away from their own target of being and destroy themselves. They operate like a plant that deliberately takes root where it cannot exist in the long run, in the shade, in a dry spot, in a location without soil. Evil people perform the same 'suicidal' action and thus disappear in the long run.

Considering the trenchant nature of Philosophy's teaching addressing so many fundamental questions in human life regarding the role of Fortune, the search for happiness, the meaning of the good, the concept of evil, the notion of free will, and providence, it is little wonder that Boethius exerted such a profound influence and can still be accepted as a major pilot light in modern human existence.

Francesco Petrarch: His Secret Investigation of His Self

As our third witness for our case that pre-modern writers have much to tell us and support us in our endeavor to recenter the Humanities with the help of late antique and medieval/Renaissance authors, I call upon Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374), who, in direct response to both Augustine and Boethius, reflected once again on the meaning of his own life and reached a profound understanding when he composed his *Secretum Meum* (begun ca. 1342, completed, or revised, in 1347).[24] Although we have commonly identified Petrarch as the major spokesperson for the early Italian Renaissance, which might certainly be true in light of many of his other texts, here in this dialogue treatise, closely modeled after Augustine and Boethius, he resolutely resorted to the medieval *Zeitgeist* and espoused strong religious concepts for his own spiritual well-being. We might hence reach the preliminary conclusion that the traditional system of periodization (Middle Ages, Renaissance, Modernity) might not help us all that effectively in coming to terms with past voices and their relevance for us today.

Whether medieval or early modern, in his *Secretum* we encounter an individual anxiously probing his own self and trying to engage with the ultimate questions of all life, which explains well why this dialogue poem has been regularly regarded as one of Petrarch's major contributions to western thought. Here we observe once again the fundamental strategy of taking a step backward, here to Augustine, in order to step forward in a renewed form of his own spirituality.[25] Although the title and the structure of the work might associate the *Secretum* directly with the genre of religious confessions, we would be better advised to identify it as part of a long tradition of *consolatio* literature, which goes directly back to Boethius.[26] Petrarch probably intended this work to be more of a personal reflection to come to terms with his quest for meaning in life and death, as the full title indicates: *Secretum de secreto conflictu curarum mearum* (A Private

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24. *Petrarch's Secret: Or The Soul's Conflict with Passion. Three Dialogues Between Himself and S. Augustine,* trans. from the Latin by William H. Draper (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1911); see also the studies by Davy A. Carozza and H. James Shey, Petrarch's Secretum with Introduction, Notes, and Critical Anthology. American University Studies, XVII.7 (New York, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1989).

25. Giulio Levi, "Pensiero classico e pensiero cristiano nel *Secretum* e nelle *Familiari* del Petrarca," *Atene e Roma* 35 (1933): 60–82; Klaus Heitman, "Augustines Lehre in Petrarcas *Secretum*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Rénaissance* 12 (1960): 34–53; A. Castelli, "Suggerimenti di un lettura del *Secretum* di Franceso Petrarca," *Rassegna delle scienze filosofiche* 22 (1969): 109–33; Massimo Verdicchio, "Petrarch's Secret: *The Secretum*," *Italian Quarterly* 57 (2020): 123-46;Gabriel Haley, "Petrarch's Secularized Contemplation," *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association* 35 (2021), 115-33.

26. Francisco Rico, *Vida u obra de Petrarca: Lectura del Secretum*. Studi sul Petrarca, 4 (Padova: Antenore, 1974), 7–38.

Conversation about the Secret of My Anxieties).[27]

On a very simple formal level, we are immediately alerted to Petrarch's intention with his work as it is predicated on an exchange with Augustine who addresses him in his unhappiness and chastises him for having forgotten, so it seems, his own mortality. One of the essential tasks of all people would be to reflect on death in a meaningful and profound manner, which hence would facilitate the struggle against one's unhappiness (41). St. Augustine, as he is formally labeled here, emphasizes three points that all people should consider: 1. if one is unhappy, one would certainly aim with all one's abilities to overcome this depression and aim for recovery, which should be considered a strong possibility (2.). But the third point (3) is that people tend to give themselves over to the pleasures of this world (42).

Petrarch essentially agrees and emphasizes that unhappiness tends to be a common problem among people, irrespective of what the critical cause of it might be (43). Augustine severely challenges his opponent for having forgotten the fundamental teachings of the classical philosophers such as Cicero, and highlights the central importance of the virtues which would, if closely observed, avoid the danger of falling into unhappiness (44). Following he repeats his earlier outline, urging his listener to keep in mind that the "first step in escaping the perplexities of human existence and rising to a higher kind of life is a meditation on the fact of death and human unhappiness" (45). But Petrarch cannot quite follow his teacher, pointing out that he would not know of any people who voluntarily had embraced unhappiness, and Augustine responds with a serious warning about his self-deception in this case, emphasizing that unhappiness remains the result of one's own inability and unwillingness to rid oneself of this feeling, as he himself had already outlined in his *Confessions* (48). Only a very strong desire for virtue and for happiness would be enough to achieve the desired goal (50).

As simple as this concept might be, that is, pure and full desire for happiness, Augustine warns Petrarch that there are many forces in life pulling the individual both up and down, meaning that spirituality and material pleasures contradict each other. First of all, constant "meditation on death . . . leads to this goal, along with the constant recollection of your mortality" (52). Reflecting on one's own mortality and that of all other living creatures, on the fragility and hence transitoriness of all things represents a major step forward in truly desiring happiness, which proves to be uncannily similar to Philosophy's observations in Boethius's treatise about the true nature of Fortune which deceives all people until they can free themselves of the contingency of the material existence: "Surrounded by all these things, one cannot escape noticing reminders of one's own mortality" (53). Unfortunately, although people have reason, only very few

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27. See also *Petrarch's Secret: or the Soul's Conflict with Passion (Three Dialogues Between Himself and S. Augustine*, trans. William H. Draper (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2015).

know how to use it properly and thus to distinguish themselves clearly from animals (54).

The key concept would be to keep death deeply in mind, to respond to this phenomenon with emotions, and to recoil at the thought of death: "you must place no hope in your talent or eloquence, in wealth and power, or in physical beauty or worldly fame, that the judge cannot be bribed, deceived, or appeased, that death itself not an end of trials, but a passage – and picture this a passage through all kinds of punishment" (56).[28] Death must be regarded as a matter if invariability and unavoidability, and then the human being begins to understand life more fully and can work effectively against unhappiness (56–57).

Undoubtedly, the approach pursued here is very different from the one espoused by Boethius, and even Augustine in his *Confessions* had emphasized a rather personal, confessional perspective. Here, in Petrarch's text, Augustine argues from the point of view of death exclusively and identifies it as the critical vehicle to learn the truth about life through that lens only. Of course, this message at first terrifies Petrarch, but Augustine reminds him that pleasure derived from sinfulness will ultimately lead to every greater unhappiness once it catches up with him (57). And he warns him to keep the larger schema of things in mind and to discipline himself so as to focus more firmly on the central aspects in human life (62).

In the second book, Augustine points out that despair in these matters would be the "ultimate evil" (65), urges Petrarch to observe more humility and keep a clear distance to the things of this world (66). Most intriguingly, he tells him that all of his worldly knowledge would be for naught if he were lacking "self-knowledge" (67), and if he would ignore all the teachings about virtue learned from the reading in the Scriptures and elsewhere, he would fail in his most essential task as a human being (67). Rhetoric and eloquence would not compensate for many of his shortcomings (68), and pride in one's own body or physical skill would be nothing but an expression of self-illusion (69), as Boethius had already formulated. In fact, Augustine goes so far as to define human life as a prison: "you poor humans know and love your prison; and although you are on the point of leaving it or being dragged out of it, you cling to it and worry about decorating what you ought to hate" (71).[29]

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28. Particularly the fourteenth century was deeply vexed by the constant reminders of death brought about by the Black Death, and other pandemics; see Jean E. Jost, "The Effects of the Black Death: The Plague in Fourteenth-Century Religion, Literature, and Art," *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 16 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 193-238. See also the other contributions to this volume.

29. As to the topic of imprisonment, prisons, and slavery, see my monograph *Freedom, Imprisonment, and Slavery in the Pre-Modern World: Cultural-Historical, Social-Literary, and Theoretical Reflections*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture,

If we scan through the subsequent sections of Books two and three, we recognize that Augustine actually offers a wide spectrum of ethical teachings for general human beings, regarding pride (71), greed (72), flattery (72), old age (74) but also modesty, and self-discipline (75). He also turns to avarice (75–76). When he considers wealth or the power of the mighty ones, we clearly perceive the basic teachings formulated by Boethius: "Certainly the kings and lords of the earth whom you think so rich need countless things" (77).

There would be many more points to be raised, especially in book three, but neither here nor in the case of Augustine's *Confession* there is an easy way into the text and to grasp in clear terms what the Church Father has to say, parallel to the statements by the other writers. Petrarch, to be sure, feels horrible and is deeply afraid of the other's comments about his own life and the general human shortcomings, but in the course of time, the two move toward each other's standpoints regarding virtue, the little value of material objects, and the need to keep death in mind all the time in order to prepare oneself for the afterlife. Arguing, as to be expected, from a very religious standpoint, Augustine insists that true happiness can rest only in a non-material afterlife. However, as the subsequent exchange reveals, humans always tend to pursue the easy path and avoid the hard climb, which really disorients and misleads them badly – a concept clearly formulated also in Petrarch's account of his ascent to Mount Ventoux in the Provence, in a letter to his former confessor, Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro, from ca. 1350 *(Epistolae familiares* IV, 1).[30] Significantly, there he reached the peak, after many struggles and wrong turns down the slope, instead of aiming for the top, and then gazed into the distance, but only to remember, after all, his Augustine. Instead of dedicating himself to the amazing beauty of the panorama below him, Petrarch then pulled out of his pocket a copy of the *Confessions*, began to read in it deeply, and thus deliberately fell back to the

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25 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), and the contributions to *Incarceration and Slavery in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: A Cultural-Historical Investigation of the Dark Side in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Studies in Medieval Literature (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Lexington Books, 2021). The comments by Augustine in Petrarch's *Secretum Meum* add important theological reflections on this topic of lack of freedom.

30. For an English translation, see Carozza and Shey, *Petrarch's Secretum* (1989), 153–60; cf. Theodore Ziolkowski, "'Tolle Lege': Epiphanies of the Book," *The Modern Language Review* 109.1 (2014): 1-14; Albrecht Classen, "The Discovery of the Mountain as an Epistemological Challenge: A Paradigm Shift in the Approach to Highly Elevated Nature. Petrarch's *Ascent to Mont Ventoux* and Emperor Maximilian's *Theuerdank*," *The Book of Nature and Humanity in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,* ed. David Hawkes and Richard G. Newhauser, with the assistance of Nathaniel Bump. Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 3–18.

medieval *Zeitgeist* determined by Augustinian ideas.[31] Whether he recovered thereby his individuality, as claimed by Unn Falkeid, might be a matter of debate.[32]

Leaving those questions aside, we can firmly conclude that Petrarch's endeavor to engage with this Church Father, to incorporate the concepts as developed by Boethius, and the reliance on the dialogue as the ideal forum for the exploration of the self within the context of the divine afterlife constituted a fundamental literary enterprise we must not ignore even today.[33] As Rocco Montano claimed, here we come across a major stepping stone for the emergence of an inner consciousness, but Petrarch was not at all the first to work at that goal, as our discussion of Augustine and Boethius has already shown.[34] Petrarch's interlocutor emphasizes that the true path toward happiness would be to dismiss material treasures and even erotic love and to turn one's attention fully to God (114).

Augustine's message here is clearly a theological one, but it convinces Petrarch and makes him reconsider his traditional approach to life, to his writing, to love, and his traditional endeavors: "If you do not desire immortal things, if you do not have regard for eternal things, you are wholly of this earth. Your fate is sealed; there is no hope left" (135). Hence, only the constant realization that life is short, that no one can predict the arrival of death, and that true happiness rests in the time after one's death, would support one's effort to live well and fully according to the highest ideals people can aspire for (136–37). Only the constant reminder of one's mortality would open the right pathway toward a meaningful life and would provide ultimate happiness, not in a morbid, but in a philosophical sense (143). The wise person understands where one's true "homeland" (143) is,

31. Pierre Courcelle, "Pétrarque entre Saint Augustin et les Augustins du XIVe Siècle," *Studi Petrarcheschi* 7 (1961): 58–71; Lyell Asher, "Petrarch at the Peak of Fame," *PMLA* 108.5 (1993): 1050-63, online at: DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/462985.

32. Unn Falkeid, "Petrarch, Mont Ventoux and the Modern Self," *Forum Italicum* 43.1 (2009): 5-28; here 23: "Petrarch articulates a universal truth about the human being; all the exemplars of the species are subjected to the inconstancy of time and space. Petrarch the wanderer, *peregrinus ubique*, demonstrates in this way that every human being is an irreplaceable and unique individual on his physical and spiritual journey throughout this earthly life."

33. Donald Beecher, "Petrarch's 'Conversion' on Mont Ventoux and the Patterns of Religious Experience," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 28.3 (2004): 55–76; Elke Waiblinger, "Augenlust und Erkundung der Seele: Francesco Petrarca auf dem Mont Ventoux," Raumerfahrung-Raumerfindung: Erzählte Welten des Mittelalters zwischen Orient und Okzident, ed. Laetitia Rimpau, Peter Ihring (Berlin: Akademie Verlag; 2005), 179–93. Most recently, see Peter H. Hansen, "Upland on Mont Ventoux," *Mountain Dialogues from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Dawn Hollis and Jason König. Ancient Environments (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 215–28.

34. Rocco Montano, "La presa di coscienza: Il *Secretum*," id., *Lo spirito e le lettere: Disegno storico della letteratura italiana* (Milan: Marzorati, 1970), vol. I, 197–200.

and s/he "desire[s] to be saved and be free" (143). Ultimately, as Augustine advises, "Follow the urging of your soul" (143). Petrarch himself finally refers, at least indirectly, to Fortune, hoping that it will not be "an obstacle" to the ideals by Augustinian and Boethian concepts (144).

Finally, a Few Other Voices: Dante and Johannes von Tepl

Parallel to those three voices, we find, of course, numerous other members of one and the same huge choir whose voices have resonated throughout the centuries. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) deserves to be mentioned here above all because his *Divina Commedia*, completed in ca. 1320, consists of a pathway through the afterworld which Dante the pilgrim succeeds to traverse only with the help of his guide Virgil in the first section, and then by Bernard of Clairvaux, and finally by his beloved Beatrice when he reaches *Paradiso*. Although a traveler through the afterlife, the literary framework constitutes a focused search for the self and the divine in one and the same moment. The act ual teaching, however, takes place through the constant exchange with the various helpers and teachers who instruct the pilgrim about the meaning of the individual scenes and the figures appearing before his eyes.[35]

About eighty years later, the German-Czech writer Johannes von Tepl created his dialogue poem *The Plowman* (ca. 1400), in which Death and the Plowman, a stand-in for all human beings, debate the meaning of death and life, of marriage, and personal happiness. At first, the Plowman voices greatest frustration, sorrow, and anger over the loss of his wife, as all honest mourners would do, but in the course of the debate between the two, the Plowman ultimately recovers his own self and defends the beauty of life as the highest glory of God. Death, by contrast, deeply steeped in the Middle Ages, dismisses the value of all material existence and insists, although at the end he loses himself in the heated debate, on his absolute superiority.

Ultimately, God intervenes and grants Death the victory because this is a law of nature. However, he also bestows honor upon the Plowman as a worthy defendant of life here on earth.[36] Both in Tepl's poem and in Dante's absolute

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35. For an excellent website with many different resources, see http://www.worldof dante.org/ (last accessed on July 10, 2022); Guy P. Raffa, *The Complete Danteworlds: A Reader's Guide to the Divine Comedy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Still of seminal importance, Erich Auerbach, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Manheim, intro. Michael Dirda (New York: New York Review Books, 2007). There is, as to be expected with a major poet like Dante, a legion of relevant studies on him.

36. Albrecht Classen, "Der *Ackermann aus Böhmen* – ein literarisches Zeugnis aus einer Schwellenzeit: Mittelalterliches Streitgespräch oder Dokument des neuzeitlichen Bewußtseins?," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 110.3 (1991): 348–373; Christian Kiening, *Schwierige Modernität: der "Ackermann" des Johannes von Tepl und die Ambiguität historischen*

masterpiece, we observe deep influences of Augustinian and Boethian thinking, and we can trace those easily throughout the following centuries as well.[37] We also recognize clearly the continuous struggle also by these medieval authors and philosophers to come to terms with their own inner self, their soul, with the question of meaning life, and the deep concern about the correct path here in this life, toward God after death. We cannot compare Dante's *Divina Commedia* or Johann von Tepl's *Ackermann* with the philosophical treatises by those three authors discussed above, but their works also signals the ongoing search for personal identity, meaning, and orientation in a rather opaque world filled with suffering, pain, and, above all, lack of direction.

Final Thoughts: The Humanities through a Medieval Lens

This now allows us to conclude with some final reflections on all of those voices as the bedrock of the Humanities until the twenty-first century. Of course, no one would have to study thoroughly Augustine, Boethius, Hildegard of Bingen, Dante, Petrarch, or Johannes von Tepl, among a host of many other names from that long time period, some being philosophers, some mystics, and some poets. Nevertheless, ignoring their individually profound impact on the entire history of western culture, philosophy, and literature might entail a dangerous level of ignorance when turning one's attention to any other texts from later ages. It might go too far to claim that those writers exerted a pervasive, ever-present impact on their posterity, but to ignore them today also blinds us to the fundamental ideas underlying the huge scaffolded body of Humanism and hence its study in the Humanities.

There are, perhaps surprisingly for those who are not familiar with those intellectual giants from the past, only few basic concerns and ideas in human life, such as death, love, meaning of life, and the quest for God. Each individual, also today, has to engage with them in one way or the other, and the more sensitively we approach them, the more profoundly will be our responses. We do not have to agree with Augustine, Boethius, or Petrarch, or with any other major figures

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Wandels. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 113 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998). Again, this is also one of those texts that have attracted much scholarship.

37. As to Boethius, see Albrecht Classen, "Boethius as a Source for Late-Medieval German Didactic Poetry? The Example of the Gnomic Poet Heinrich der Teichner," *Carmina Philosophiae* 15 (2006): 63–88; id., "Boethius and No End in Sight: The Impact of *De consolatione philosophiae* on Early Modern German Literature From the Fifteenth Through the Seventeenth Century: Andreas Gryphius and Johann Scheffler (Angelus Silesius)," *Daphnis* 46 (2018): 448–66 (online at: doi 10.1163/18796583-04601010); *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor and Dario Brancato. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 30 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

from the pre-modern world, in specific terms. However, as we have seen, in their own reflections they had already come to terms with most of the crucial issues by questing for an understanding of human happiness and spirituality, which might be simply two different terms for the same phenomenon.

I would not want to argue that we turn away from the philosophical or literary discourse of our own time, by far not. But anyone dedicated to gaining more extensive understanding of him/herself through a humanistic approach would have to acknowledge the roots, the tree trunk, the branches, and the leaves of the metaphorical tree. The three voices discussed here certainly represent major sections of the extensive root system of the tree representing us until today.[38]

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38. See, again, the individual studies in my edited volume, *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century* (2022). I have no doubt that we could make similar claims with regard to many other major literary figure or philosopher, both in the West and in the East, or in other parts of the world. We are, to repeat the famous observation, only dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, but considering, for instance, Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* even today means that the giant helps the dwarf to develop further.

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