

MILESTONES

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501-812-2200
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Cover Art

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Editor's Note

Wow—Volume 20! It is hard to believe that *Milestones* has now been celebrating student writing for twenty years. Over the past two decades, this publication has showcased the most outstanding essays from some of the most talented, insightful, and creative students at UA-PTC.

Each year, I am amazed by the skill and originality our students bring to the page, and this year is no exception. The essays in this twentieth volume reflect the voices of a new generation—curious, thoughtful, and unafraid to explore big ideas.

This collection explores a range of meaningful and timely themes. Writers examine the challenges of adapting to rapidly evolving technology, from video games to artificial intelligence. Others draw compelling connections between modern literary characters and ancient Greek myths, or reflect on characters wrestling with the weight of societal expectations and personal morality.

Furthermore, these essays highlight the power of perseverance, empathy, and connection. They remind us of the importance of caring for our loved ones, making peace across generational divides, and respecting both the natural world and one another.

It has been my pleasure to help bring this volume together. I hope you enjoy reading these essays as much as I have enjoyed selecting and preparing them for you.

Leslie J. Lovenstein
Managing Editor

Tevin McCool

Musical Sampling as Art and Fair Use

Diamond Award Winner for Academic Writing

In the 1990s, hip-hop was a culture and musical genre barely out of its infancy, but already a commercial phenomenon. And why wouldn't it be? While the culture was relatively new, the music exhibited every appealing aspect of its sonic ancestors. Its intense musical fusion incorporated pieces of everything from American R and B classics like James Brown to cult French composers like Alain Goraguer through its intrinsic and modern musical backbone: sampling.

Sampling is the process of taking a select part of a song or existing piece of audio media and repurposing it to create something new through the use of modern musical equipment. A popular example of sampling that most would recognize is the song "Hypnotize" by the artist The Notorious B.I.G., which uses a manipulated 15-second sample of the song "Rise" by Herb Alpert. Notably, even the infamous and beloved introductory bass notes in the theme of the critically acclaimed television series *Twin Peaks* are samples. While mostly going unnoticed, it has been controversial since its inception to those in the know, and critics of the style often labeled this practice as lazy or even intellectual theft. However, I argue that not only does the practice of sampling meet the legal definition of fair use, but it also exhibits a rich lineage in not only Western musical canon but also philosophical overlap with other widely accepted artistic mediums; As Michel de Montaigne says, "I quote others only in order the better to express myself" (3).

Contemporary music is built upon the same basic principles regardless of genre or presentation. Interpolation, a type of informed stylistic reworking, is one of these traditional principles

and has existed for as long as music has been performed and published. Charles Gounod's Catholic staple "Ave Maria" famously was built upon an interpolation of Bach's "Prelude in C Major," who even before then had several times interpolated popular works by Vivaldi. Kevin Holm-Hudson expounds on this concept of universal-musical-interpolation in *Leonardo Music Journal* stating, "Contemporary sampling of a James Brown beat is not so far removed from Mozart's appropriation of a gavotte dance rhythm in a piano sonata. Both are examples of stylistic appropriation drawing upon commonly recognized dance rhythms of the particular culture within which the new work is created" (2). Another highly comparable, and formally accepted practice is covering another musician's song or work. A commercial example of this would be Johnny Cash's critically acclaimed cover of "Hurt," a song originally composed and recorded by the post-hardcore industrial band Nine Inch Nails. While fundamentally the same song, Cash sonically recontextualizes "Hurt" without changing the song compositionally; sampling explores this same concept in a more sonically direct way. "All Caps" by the producer-rapper duo Madvillian is constructed using four different unrelated sample sources: "Opening Credits – Crime Scene" by Jeannot Szwarc, "Bumping Bus Stop" by Thunder and Lighting, "Sometimes I Rhyme Slow" by Nice and Smooth, and a choppy excerpt of dialogue from the TV series "Streets of San Francisco" directed by Michael Caffey. These samples are represented technically in their original sonic form but become completely recontextualized in "All Caps." In the same way, Cash recontextualizes "Hurt" with his cover, and Gounod recontextualizes "Prelude in C Major" in "Ave Maria." Poignantly put by Mark Katz in *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, "Traditional musical quotations typically cite works; samples cite performances" (1).

"Fair use" is defined by copyright.gov as "a legal doctrine that promotes freedom of expression by permitting the unlicensed

use of copyright-protected works in certain circumstances.” Legally, the principle of fair use exists to protect artists’ freedom to use copyrighted works in “transformative” contexts, or in cases “that add something new, with a further purpose or different character, and do not substitute for the original use of the work.” This language already supports the use of sampled material as fair use by the merit that sampling via its nature is broadly transformative. For example, in 2009, the Associated Press (AP) informally, but publicly, implied that the artist Shepard Fairey, widely known as “OBEY,” committed an act of intellectual theft by using an image taken by one of their photographers as the primary reference for his infamous “Hope” painting, when just three years before, “Hope” had become the unofficial slogan and image of the Obama election campaign (Chanen 4). Fairey responded to this claim by asserting his work only used the photo as a reference and was transformative and therefore fair use, even going so far as to ask a federal court to declare it as such. AP responded to this by suing Fairey for copyright infringement, only to lose steam due to Fairey’s defense’s assertion of fair use and eventually being forced to settle out of court. While a different artistic medium, this case is especially relevant due to the artwork’s stylistic interpretation and bold recontextualization of the original photograph in the same fashion as sampling in music. Sampling, by definition, transforms its original source material through its recontextualization. The most essential example of recontextualizing in the practice of sampling is the process of disassembling a sample through decisive and specific cuts, popularly known as “chopping”. This process consists of meticulously isolating each desired sound or element so it can be reorganized in a completely different pattern than the original performers intended. Via this process, a producer can use samples to paint an entirely new sonic image from the sampled material, like a visual artist such as Fairey might use a reference.

In the minidocumentary “Madlib Meets Ethiopian Legend

Ayaléw Mesfin” produced by Noisey for Vice, the producers and record label-heads Otis “Madlib” Jackson and Eothen “Egon” Alapatt discuss the process of tracking down an obscure Ethiopian jazz musician. “I said I owe it to myself to try and find this guy and see not only if I can make him some money but clear this sample and maybe try to find out more about his music,” Alapatt explains.

Through the work done to track down and clear the sampled material in question, Alapatt and Jackson uncovered Ayalew Mesfin’s musical legacy that would have otherwise become lost to the culture at large. Later in the documentary, we hear from Mesfin himself as he expands upon the impact Jackson and Alapatt’s efforts to platform his art had on him as a person and as an artist. This documentary highlights an often-underappreciated but essential aspect of sampling: “crate-digging.” Crate-digging is the practice of finding increasingly more obscure samples, thereby exposing both the audience and the producer to new sonic expressions that would otherwise fly under the radar. Through digging for and then subsequently clearing samples, artists who would never have mainstream appeal can profit from their work in a way that would have previously been impossible. This benefits both artists mutually, even financially benefiting the author of the sampled material predominately.

The arguments against sampling as legitimate artistic expression are often steeped in crediting and musical composition as a form of intellectual property. These arguments hold merit in one regard: crediting matters. Ultimately, if a sample-based artist wants to financially profit from their work, they are obligated to at minimum ask the permission of the sampled artist. In 1987, hip-hop group De La Soul released their debut album 3 Feet High and Rising to extraordinary critical acclaim, quickly becoming certified platinum by the RIAA while the group were still teenagers. Shortly after the release and subsequent acclaim,

Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman of the American band The Turtles filed a lawsuit against the group and their label, Tommy Boy, for copyright infringement. One of the musical interludes, or “skits,” was the track “Transmitting Live from Mars,” which contained a twelve-second sample from the band’s 1969 song “You Showed Me.” Amid the lawsuit, Volman was quoted in the Los Angeles Times saying that “sampling is just a longer term for theft . . . anybody who can honestly say sampling is some sort of creativity has never done anything creative” (5). This type of language is prolific throughout the case, decrying the legitimacy of the medium itself and ultimately tainting the public’s perception of the art form. De La Soul and their record label were forced to settle out of court for \$1.7 million, setting a dark legal precedent for young aspiring artists. Legally The Turtles had every right, but the draconian level of the punishment sent ripples through the music industry, with Tommy Boy’s lawyer later being quoted saying “[Volman and Kaylan are] taking the kind of position that if adopted generally would seriously hurt, if not kill, [sampling/hip-hop] outright” (6). This lawsuit effectively ended major label interest in De La Soul as up-and-coming hip-hop artists in the music industry, eventually leading to their fall from major label interest before they even released their second album.

Sampling represents a modern approach to practices that have been a part of musical and artistic tradition since classical antiquity. Despite the legal and ideological pushback, inarguably, sampling is slowly winning the battle culturally. The Billboard Hot 100 is regularly dominated by songs full of sampled material, even proliferating genres outside of hip-hop as the process becomes more and more normalized. The mass appeal and commercial success sampling has given way to is undeniable, while still being haunted by the specter of stringent copyright law. Hopefully, this success will lead to a more modern legal approach to fair use in audio media and more approachable avenues for paying royalties between artists.

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Cole McDaniel

Finding Sisyphus in “The Guest”

Diamond Award Winner for Literary Analysis Writing

Born in French Algeria, Albert Camus was a key figure in existential philosophy and a prominent twentieth-century French author. Camus’s philosophy revolved around the concept of absurdity. He emphasized a conflict between the human tendency to find meaning and moral clarity in their life and the cold, indifferent universe. In his 1955 short story “The Guest,” Camus uses the protagonist Daru’s experiences to highlight the moral dilemmas that define absurdism. Through the characters in the story, he explores a concept developed in his earlier work: the absurd hero. When applying Camus’s absurdist philosophy and examining the characters of the story in that light, the prisoner best fills the role of Camus’s absurd hero.

To understand Camus and the absurd hero, it is first worth looking at his 1942 essay, “The Myth of Sisyphus.” Sisyphus is a figure in Greek mythology, the king of Ephyra, condemned by Zeus to roll a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down each time. Camus argues that this myth encapsulates the human condition: a perpetual struggle with no hope for success. However, he suggests that there is dignity in this struggle if it is understood, writing, “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*). Camus is suggesting that the only way to truly cope in the absurd universe is to embrace it (Plant). In the essay, Camus proposes that revolting against the conditions presented by the absurd universe is the best response. To him, all of humanity faces this problem: to ascribe purpose to one’s own life and work meaningfully toward it, only to find that all this struggle will certainly end in death. Camus considers Sisyphus an absurd hero because when he is faced with eternal torment,

with no opportunity to escape, he embraces his punishment, denying his tormentor—or the world—the satisfaction of seeing Sisyphus agonize.

“The Guest” is set in French Algeria in the 1950s. Daru, a French schoolteacher, is unwillingly tasked with escorting an Arab prisoner, whom he seems to hope will escape. Most of the story takes place in Daru’s schoolhouse, which sits on a remote, elevated plateau in the desert. Balducci, a gendarme, delivers the prisoner to Daru. Balducci is a dutiful officer, who seems mostly indifferent to Daru’s questions about the morality of the task. The prisoner is an enigmatic character, who seems nervous and offers Daru little information about himself or his situation. After receiving his task, Daru lies awake for much of the night, unsure of how he will proceed. Finally, he decides to walk the Arab part of the way to the prison. Eventually, he stops and presents the Arab with a choice. He can take the path ahead to the prison, or he can run away and join a nearby group of Bedouins who, according to their customs, will help the Arab. The Arab elects to take the road to the prison, and Daru returns to find a threatening message left for him: “You handed over our brother. You will pay for this” (Camus, “The Guest” 754).

Since Daru prides himself on his nuanced understanding of the Algerian conflict, the task presents a significant moral dilemma. On one hand, Daru is a loyal French citizen and feels disgusted at the thought that the prisoner has committed a murder. On the other hand, he is suspicious of the state and understands there is a possibility this man is being arrested simply for being Arabian, refusing to assimilate into French society, and supporting Algerian independence. Additionally, Daru thought it contrary to the idea of honor for him to take part in the Arab’s punishment. In this sense, Daru finds himself facing an absurd situation. Although he has thought out his own morals and passionately believes them, Daru has inherited this situation

in which he is compelled to take part regardless of his feelings on the matter (Sterling).

By Albert Camus's definition of Sisyphus as an absurd hero, could one consider Daru to be an absurd hero? Daru at some point seems to have become conscious of the absurdity of life, musing "No one in this desert, neither he or his guest, mattered." (Camus, "The Guest" 750). Yet, he does not seem to have quite embraced it. "The Guest" is a story marked by turmoil. Daru torments himself over the situation in which he has been placed. He first tells Balducci that he refuses to carry out the task. Balducci, speaking for the absurd world, replies that he is not being given a choice, but is instead being ordered to take part in delivering the prisoner. Still, despite this situation forcing itself upon Daru, he defies the orders and allows the prisoner to decide his own fate. In this sense, Daru is attempting to deny the cold, uncaring nature of the world, or what Camus would call the absurd world. Despite knowing that he cannot back out of the task he was given and that the prisoner's fate is likely already sealed, he tries to escape his obligation. He is trying to stop Sisyphus' boulder from rolling down the hill. Daru finds himself despairing at the end of the story after learning the Arab has elected to turn himself in.

Although Daru is aware of the absurdity the world presents him, he still agonizes about it and believes he can escape it, instead of embracing it as Sisyphus does. In the Greek myth, Sisyphus tricks the Gods into letting him out of Hades, only for the gods to eventually pull him back to his boulder and his hill once more. This mirrors where Daru finds himself. He is aware of the absurdity of his task, yet he has not come to terms with its inescapable nature. Daru is journeying toward enlightenment, though he cannot be considered an absurd hero yet.

Balducci, the gendarme, symbolizes the French state. He is

defined by unquestioning allegiance to the colonial government. He mentions that he looks at Daru as a son, symbolizing Daru's immutable citizenship within the state. When Daru attempts to resist following the orders Balducci gives him, the gendarme becomes annoyed. To Balducci, rules are rules, and they must be followed. Where does Balducci fit within the myth of Sisyphus? At first, it seems that Balducci has not become aware of the absurdity of his task. One could assume Balducci follows orders simply because they are orders and has not constructed a set of moral principles. However, Balducci hints that he understands this predicament and has opted to embrace it, saying "I don't like it either. You don't get used to putting a rope on a man even after years of it, and you're even ashamed—yes, ashamed. But you can't let them have their way" (Camus, "The Guest" 749). In this sentence, Camus tells his readers that Balducci has constructed a set of moral principles. Balducci's principles are duty, loyalty, and responsibility. Although he does not like the idea of carrying out his task, he has embraced it. Balducci accepts the world as it is—indifferent and often illogical—and continues to find personal integrity and a sense of purpose within this framework. He does not seem to suffer from the same moral ambiguity as Daru; instead, he accepts the conditions of his existence and performs his role with a clear conscience, finding his own sense of freedom within the strictures of his duty.

So, could one consider Balducci a literary comrade to Sisyphus? Is Balducci an absurd hero? In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus writes, "You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*). Balducci seems to embrace his torture, yet he does not appear to be doing so despite his passions. In fact, Camus offers no hint that Balducci has passion. A key element

which makes Sisyphus an absurd hero prevents Balducci, like Daru, from embodying this role: rebellion. To Camus, Sisyphus' defiance of the gods and trickery to cheat death are crucial elements which make up the absurd hero (Plant). Balducci's suppression of his passion, or lack of passion, means he cannot be an absurd hero.

The prisoner of this story faces the most absurd world of all the characters. The prisoner's world began to present its absurdity as soon as he was born: an Arab in the oppressive colonial state of French Algeria. French rule in Algeria was characterized by atrocities carried out against the Algerian people. In a land occupied by oppressors and oppressed people, the prisoner was born into the latter category. He has now been captured by the French authorities and is accused of murder. He has seen his fellow Algerians subjected to rape, torture, execution, and internment. His silent, contemplative demeanor suggests he understands his bleak circumstances well. Throughout the story, Daru makes note of the physicality of the Arab. Notably, he observes the man's mouth, which is quiet and moves little. Yet, he also notes his eyes, and how they seem perceptive: "His eyes convey more awareness and, at times, even rebellion. They look directly and boldly into Daru's eyes on several occasions and seem to 'read' him clearly" (Anderson 93). The Arab, by using few actions or words, is subtly defiant. He maintains his ambiguity because he is aware of his situation and wishes to maintain what control he can over it. The prisoner displays this understanding when he is offered the choice of walking to his prison or walking to his freedom. Rather than impulsively choosing freedom, he considers his options and the implications of his choice. In contrast, Daru refuses to make his existential choice, and Balducci never stops to consider he has a choice at all.

By walking toward the prison, and thus rejecting freedom, the prisoner embraces his torture despite having awareness

of his opportunity to avoid it. In a sense, by choosing to walk toward the prison, he is in rebellion against the expected path. He recognizes that although he can physically escape his captors, at least temporarily, he cannot escape his marginalized existence. By walking toward the prison, he denies the world the opportunity to see him run away. His decision to walk down the hill to the prison mirrors Sisyphus' decision to walk down the hill to push the boulder once again. Returning to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus writes, "It is during that return [down the hill], that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end" (Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*). Camus makes it clear that he sees Sisyphus' walk down the hill as an assertion of his agency and acceptance of his fate. When the Arab walks down the hill, he does so in a deliberate acceptance of his reality; he fully understands and engages with the absurdity of his existence. In this sense, the Arab is the true absurd hero of the story.

Camus built his philosophy around this concept of absurdity. His early work centered on the concept, and in later works such as "The Guest" elements of it are still found. To embody the absurd hero, a character must walk a fine line. A character must simultaneously be not only trapped but also exercise freedom within that framework. They must surrender to their fate while also rebelling against it. The Arab prisoner faces oppression from birth, struggling in his existence under colonial oppression. Despite this, he maintains a quiet defiance and awareness of his situation. When given a choice to face his punishment or escape it, he refuses to conform to expectations and instead embraces his fate, recognizing the futility of trying to escape a marginalized existence. It is tempting to prescribe the role of the absurd hero to the protagonist of this story, but upon close inspection, the Arab prisoner is the true brother to Sisyphus.

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Keith Allen Lambert, Jr.

Love Yours

Diamond Award Winner for Personal Writing

My body temperature rises as the perspiring sweat leaves the pores of my skin. I am uncomfortably crammed inside of a plastic, small, and rigid boxed-in area. My side aches from the buckle of the car digging into my rib cage. I am hyper-focused on the sound of the rain, wind, and motion of the vehicles on the road. As I listen to the sounds of cars speeding past, I pretend I am on a family camping trip in the woods near the highway. I imagine the cars hurrying to their night shifts. The borborygmus in my stomach is so distracting that it keeps me from sleep; I cringe at the non-stop growling. It sounds like a freight train. GRRRR. I wait and fantasize about what food will be at school tomorrow. Am I the only kid in the fifth grade who is going through this? Why am I the only one wearing the same piece of cloth on my back every single day?

I want to fit in with them. I want the cool, trendy outfits everyone else wears in the crowded, loud hallways. The thought of wanting everything you have never had can scratch the walls of your mind every day. The itch for a boost of dopamine humankind strives for can be addicting, the feeling of a compliment when you obtain something new to impress others around you is a great feeling; but for how long does that feeling last? For Christmas, I begged my mom for Nike Elite socks. Everyone had them. They were the trendiest thing a kid could have clothing-wise in the fifth grade. When I got the Nike Elite socks, I was ecstatic! I had all the confidence in the world, which may sound silly to some, but it touched me deep down just to receive a present at all. Back at school, everyone was talking about what they received for Christmas on the big yellow bus Bus 202. My cousin Jaylin Scott sat right next to me every day.

He asked what I got for Christmas. With a faint whisper under my breath, I replied “Nike Elite Socks. That’s all I wanted.” He burst out into tears of laughter yelling to everyone, “All he got was Nike Elite Socks.” All I could do was giggle as I sunk into my seat as if I were stuck in quicksand. The amazing thing about the human brain is that you mature and learn from situations. In my case, should I be looking for others’ validation or should I love and impress myself? You cannot impress everyone. Learn to love what you have and the position God put you in.

I knew the position I was in; I knew being a single mother of four was not easy. My mother did as much as she could with what she was given. After what felt like ten years of waiting, she was finally able to get us admitted into a women’s shelter. The women’s shelter was not so bad. At least I could keep two of my sisters with me. We had no social media to feed us the lives the media shows us we should have. We had unlimited time to study. The only thing that was missing in my life that mattered to me more than anything we were going through was my father, Keith Allen Lambert Sr. He was a great man in my eyes, in other eyes not so much. I began to fall inside of the view of others. The memories of my hand across the three-inch-thick bulletproof prison glass, comparing how big my hand had gotten compared to his hand, with the only thing connecting us two together being a metal corded phone with bad voice quality from two feet away started to fade within my mind.

Eventually, everything I ever thought I wanted started to roll into my life. The clothes, shoes, women, and a huge group of individuals I thought were my friends felt so temporary within my heart. Every time, I thought love lasted within the moment and faded the next; every time, I got a compliment on materialistic items faded once taken off. Why though, everything I always wanted, everything I always looked up to, why is it not filling that void in my heart? I felt so much happier when I was homeless,

at least I knew myself. I stopped calling my father, and I fell out of touch with him. I was so distracted by the world around me. Using the excuse of my father being in and out of prison was my only excuse to ignore the only reason I stepped foot into this accursed world we live in. I used every resource around me to distract myself from what mattered most.

My life was a chess game to wake up to reality. When the lukewarm teardrops crashed into the side of my cheek as if I were lying in a distant-less yard on a rainy day, my mother ran her hand through my soft curly hair, sitting at the head of my small narrow creaking bed. I awoke and asked, “What’s wrong, ma? What happened?” As she answered so subtly, “Your daddy died, KJ.” I froze with complete numbness in my mind, and with my heart at the bottom of my chest, I asked so faintly that my words carried so loudly as if they were typed in the back of my mind with a typewriter, “What happened to him?” “He died of an overdose,” she said. That very moment was a pause; nothing felt real. On the day of the funeral, seeing all my family members gather to look at my late great dad for one last time, life struck me like a freight train. For once I felt something real. Money, clothes, sex, and having the largest group of people around you do not matter when the Lord calls you back home. What will always matter to me is “Love Yours.” Love your best friend, love your family, love the resources you have around you, always be grateful, and most importantly, love yourself. It was never about the socks that brought me joy or the experience of being homeless that caused me sadness; having the people who loved me around was the bright spot in my life.

Travis Haskin

Phantom Liberty: The Revival of Cyberpunk 2077

One of CD Projekt Red's most well-known titles, *Cyberpunk 2077*, left players with a bad taste in their mouths due to the buggy and unfinished initial release of the game. However, their newest expansion pack, "Phantom Liberty", as well as the latest 2.0 update, have brought *Cyberpunk* back from the grave with tons of incredible new content and performance improvements.

The main story takes place in Night City, a massive, dystopian megalopolis filled with neon lights, blaring advertisements, and greedy corporations. The main character you play as, V, is a mercenary in Night City and is faced with a life-or-death situation. After an unsuccessful heist at Konpeki Plaza, they are left with a damaged prototype biochip in their brain that is both the reason they are still alive and the reason they're slowly dying. On that chip is the personality construct of Johnny Silverhand, a terrorist rocker boy from the early 21st century (voiced by and modeled after Keanu Reeves), and through many trials and tribulations, he gradually becomes more friendly with V. "Phantom Liberty" takes place in a walled-off sub-town separate from Night City called "Dogtown," a sort of barren wasteland with no law enforcement. V is selected by the Federal Intelligence Agency (FIA) to assist in a mission to save the president of the New United States of America (NUSA), and, in return, offered a way to save them from the ticking time bomb in their head. It is through this mission that V meets Song So Mi, also known as "Songbird" (voiced by and modeled after Minji Chang). She is an exceedingly talented net runner who works as an intelligence analyst for the NUSA. They also meet Solomon Reed, a sleeper agent of the FIA, with extreme loyalty and a sense of duty to his country (voiced by and modeled after Idris Elba). There are many twists and turns

throughout the story, and it is filled with several jaw-dropping and tear-jerking moments. Through the decisions that V makes, the story can come to one of four new, unique endings.

One of the things that really worked about “Phantom Liberty” is the incredible amount of additional, high-quality content. Through this expansion, CDPR adds new side missions, a new storyline, new music, new characters, and a new skill tree. I found this impressive because it shows just how much their teams went the extra mile to bring a new life to Cyberpunk. It almost feels like a brand-new game, especially when compared to the initial release version. In terms of new side missions, “Phantom Liberty” still has the same basic mission types, but these missions have been expanded into lengthier, more unique side quests. While the gigs in Night City are all relatively simple—eliminate somebody, steal something, rescue a hostage, etc.—the gigs that take place in Dogtown have more depth and story to them, several of them requiring you to make some sort of moral decision, which can result in multiple different outcomes.

Although they don’t have much effect on the main story, the gigs throughout the game bring a sense of charm, liveliness, and depth to Night City and Dogtown, as well as its residents.

Another amazing addition that came with the new expansion pack is its phenomenal soundtrack. CDPR brought so much new-and-improved content with “Phantom Liberty” that they decided to give the expansion its own brand-new original soundtrack. They had no reason to add any more music to the game, but they did, again just showing how much additional effort the team put into putting this masterpiece together. I personally loved how accurately the soundtrack depicted the emotions in certain situations, significantly elevating the excitement and tension throughout the story. Throughout the game, the music changes dynamically depending on the situation you are in. For example, if

you are in the middle of a stealth mission and an enemy finds you, the music will crescendo, going from soft and quiet to loud and hard, and vice versa if you leave the enemies' detection. I loved the banging drums and bass in the combat music so much that there were several instances where I found myself purposefully getting into fights just to hear it again.

Now, not everything I have to say about Cyberpunk is good, but that does not reduce my enjoyment of the game. Although there were some added visual animations, especially seen in some of the earlier missions, I wish we had seen them more throughout the rest of the story. Since the game takes place entirely in the first person, there were many times when I would be having hard-hitting, heart-felt conversations with characters and, since I was the only one in control of what I did and did not look at, I sometimes felt more like a cameraman than a character. I wish there were more instances where the game took a more cinematic, cut-scene-like approach, especially in circumstances with pressing dialogue. I feel like this would have had an overall positive effect on the story's captivation and immersion.

Speaking of dialogue, the characters in "Phantom Liberty" are covered from top to bottom in depth and development, and you experience all this through the dialogue and encounters you exchange with them. Throughout the story, you learn to love or hate certain characters, especially depending on what decisions you make. I developed a great sense of empathy for a lot of the characters and found a lot of their stories to be very heart-warming and/or heart-breaking, which made me even more immersed in the game's story. And the actors' performances are just the cherry on top. Keanu Reeves already did an excellent job of portraying Johnny Silverhand's character in the base game, portraying an incredible development of character as he became closer to V. In "Phantom Liberty," Reeves manages to display an even better depiction of Silverhand, expanding on his mournful

side by understanding his existence as an unsuccessful anarchist imprisoned in another person's body. Christine Minji Chang also brings life to the new character, Song So Mi, aka "Songbird," who wishes for a sense of belonging as she begins to feel like she is being perceived more like a tool for the disposal of her superiors than an actual person with desires and beliefs. The iconic Idris Elba is introduced into "Phantom Liberty" as Solomon Reed, a sleeper agent who is brought back into commission with V's assignment to save the president of the NUSA. Elba's performance brings a lot of depth to Reed's character by switching between his serious, tough-guy side as Night City's greatest spy, and his more vulnerable, remorseful side once he begins to open up more to V about his past. All of these actors' performances do an excellent job of bringing life to their unique characters, which helps make the overall experience of Cyberpunk so much more immersive and captivating.

No game is perfect, and Cyberpunk 2077 is no exception. However, the people at CD Projekt Red have made an incredible accomplishment with the release of "Phantom Liberty," bringing a breath of fresh air to their previously known failure of a project. For players like me, who witnessed the disaster that was Cyberpunk's initial launch, this new expansion felt like a brand-new experience, filled to the brim with tons of new and improved stories, music, and characters. Whether or not you played the game at launch, I highly recommend playing it now; I promise it is worth your time.

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Laurence Hartter

***Uncanny Valley: Human Emotion in
the Poetry of Dickinson and Rossetti***

When confronted with the unknown, humans have the tendency to rely on their emotions to process unfamiliar phenomena. Throughout history, humans have created art, such as painting and music, to attempt to encapsulate the full expression of human emotion. Language itself, as an art form, as seen in poetic imagery elegantly illustrating shifts of light and fairytales warning of destruction and despair, mirrors the emotional expression of the characters' and authors' perspectives on new experiences. However, in the rapidly changing, global era of the internet, discerning real, human, emotion from generatively created emotion has become challenging. With further research being conducted in the field of Artificial Intelligence, or AI, computer programs are becoming increasingly more human-like in expressions of emotion (Zhao et al. 1-5), which introduces concerns about how modern-day audiences of art online can determine whether the art, literature, or music that they consume is human or artificially produced. In a comprehensive study of YouTube consumer's comments regarding AI, conducted by Management Science Professors at Yanbu Industrial College, when presented with unknown phenomena that resembles themselves, but is not, consumers experience "uncanny valley," or the feeling that the Artificial Intelligence looks human, but does not feel human (Sohaib and Abdullah 1317-1323). Historically, in literature, one of the main defining features of humanity is the emotions inherent to human beings. For example, in the poems "Goblin Market" by Christina Rossetti and Poem 258, "There's a certain Slant of light," by Emily Dickinson, both poets describe emotions as phenomena that can only be experienced by humans. In the poem "Goblin Market," Rossetti illustrates despair and compassion as being

applicable to her human characters but not to the “goblin men”; comparatively, in the poem “There’s a certain Slant of light,” Dickinson uses the inclusive “we” pronoun when portraying despair to create solidarity between the narrator and her audience in their shared expression of melancholic emotion. Throughout their two poems, both Rossetti and Dickinson illustrate that it is only through human emotion that life and creation is caused and that the creation caused by human emotion cannot be easily replicated because emotion is inherently human in nature and is the link that ties humans to one another.

Throughout their two poems, Rossetti and Dickinson assert that human emotion is the cause of life and creation; however, while Rossetti uses characterization to illustrate this claim, Dickinson utilizes personification. In the poem “Goblin Market” by Christina Rossetti, when Laura falls ill as a result of ingesting the goblins’ fruits, it is only the other human character, Lizzie, who is able to revitalize her (lines 464–542). Specifically, Rossetti characterizes Lizzie’s worry and compassion as the driving forces behind Lizzie’s compassion to save her sister. When Lizzie returns to Laura with the antidote, Rossetti writes that Lizzie proclaims, “For your sake I have braved the glen” (line 473); by including the phrase “for your sake” and the word “braved” (line 473), Rossetti identifies the motivation of Lizzie’s courage: her love and compassion for her sister. It is only through this human emotion of love that Lizzie gathers the courage, despite her fear of the goblin men, to ultimately save her sister’s life. Similarly, despite Dickinson’s poem “There’s a certain Slant of light” not having readily definable characters like “Goblin Market,” outside of the narrator and the heavens (and it could be argued the environment), Dickinson also asserts that human creation causes life and beauty. In the last stanza of her poem, Dickinson writes that when despair “comes, the Landscape listens— / Shadows—hold their breath—” (lines 13–14). By including these lines in her poem, Dickinson illustrates, through her use of personification of the natural phenomena of the “landscape” (line 13) and

“shadows” (line 14), that the world is irrevocably transformed by the human emotion of despair. Despite using different rhetorical techniques (characterization and personification respectively), Rossetti and Dickinson both illustrate that it is emotion that causes transformation and creation; however, modernly, Artificial Intelligence is trained to create based on logic and scientific reasoning. In a study training an AI program named Emotion AWARE to detect emotions from human text, researchers at La Trobe University and Virginia Commonwealth University use mathematic equations and algorithm programming (Gamage et al. 8-10) to assign “corresponding intensity values” between 0 and 1 (Gamage et al. 2) to certain text excerpts ranging from social media posts to fairytale passages (Gamage et al. 12). Currently, Artificial Intelligence cannot create without logic, and cannot create with emotion like the human characters and narrator in Rossetti’s and Dickinson’s poetry.

Throughout their poetry, Rossetti and Dickinson also assert that emotion is inherently human in nature. In “Goblin Market,” Rossetti characterizes the goblin men as being unable to feel the despair that the human characters, Laura, Lizzie, and Jeanie, feel. Laura feels despair after eating the goblin’s fruits, as she “no more swept the house” (Rossetti line 293) and “with sunk eyes and faded mouth” “dreamed of melons” (Rossetti lines 288-289), Lizzie feels despair after viewing her sister’s depression, as she “could not bear / To watch her sister’s cankerous care” (Rossetti lines 299-300), and Jeanie felt despair in the moments before death, as “She pined and pined away” (Rossetti line 154) and “dwindled and grew grey” (Rossetti line 156). However, the goblins in the poem are unable to feel this human despair, because if they had empathized with the despair felt by Laura and Lizzie and Jeanie, they would have ceased their efforts in causing harm to the three humans in the name of their own self-indulgence; furthermore, the despair felt by Laura, Lizzie, and Jeanie cannot be taught to the goblin men, as they do not cease nor apologize in their attacks of Lizzie even after viewing her being

hurt repeatedly (Rossetti lines 398–446). Similarly, in “There’s a certain Slant of light,” Dickinson asserts that “None may teach it—Any— / ‘Tis the Seal Despair—” (lines 9–10), therefore illustrating that despair cannot be taught but is rather inherently known in human beings. Furthermore, Dickinson describes that “We can find no scar” (line 6) with despair and that despair is an “internal difference, / Where the meanings, are—” (lines 7–8), asserting that despair cannot be viewed physically, but it is the mental turmoil that shapes meaning into human life. If the goblin men can only see the physical scars of Lizzie and not her mental turmoil, as Dickinson claims that despair cannot be taught, then they would react similarly to how they act as characters within “Goblin Market”: apathetic of the anguish that they bestow upon others. However, claiming that physical pain and mental pain are not interconnected is false; for example, Christina Rossetti experienced several severe chronic illnesses such as Graves’ Disease (Harrison 418) in her lifetime, which, according to a Professor of English at North Carolina State University, Antony Harrison (“Antony Harrison”), likely influenced her portrayal of the emotions and the illness of Jeanie and Laura in her poem “Goblin Market” (Harrison 416–417). Therefore, emotion, according to Rossetti and Dickinson, is inherently human; it cannot be taught logically and is interconnected with human expressions of illness. Modernly, many Artificial Intelligence programs, such as the Emotion AWARE program, are taught how to recognize and display human-like emotions through logic-based reasoning (Gamage et al. 8–10); despite the fact that the poetry of Rossetti and Dickinson was published nearly one hundred and seventy years ago, their claims of human emotions as being inherently human in nature apply to modern-day issues of identifying non-human creation in a rapidly changing, technological world.

However, not only do Rossetti and Dickinson assert that emotions are inherently human, but they also both describe emotions as the phenomena that tie humans with one another. Therefore, social connection can largely only be achieved through

authentic emotion, which at the present level of research and training, Artificial Intelligence still struggles to produce. However, in “Goblin Market,” emotions— compassion, despair, and empathy— are what strengthen Laura’s and Lizzie’s sisterhood throughout the poem. In the last stanza of the poem, Lizzie, Laura, and their children clasp hands with one another and proclaim, “For there is no friend like a sister . . . / To lift if one totters down, / To strengthen whilst one stands” (Rossetti lines 562–567); by including this dialogue, Rossetti illustrates the strength of the bond between Laura and Lizzie, which could not have occurred without the compassion that Lizzie felt towards her sister and the empathy that allowed Lizzie to contextualize Laura’s despair after eating the goblin fruits. Just as Laura endured despair and “kept watch in vain / In sullen silence of exceeding pain” (Rossetti lines 270–271), Lizzie had to endure immense pain to receive the antidote for her sister; both of the sisters experienced despair, and their shared feelings of despair allowed for Lizzie to connect and aid her sister, to become her friend like no other (Rossetti line 562) and “strengthen [her] whilst one stands” (Rossetti line 567). However, while Rossetti employs descriptions of emotional parallels between her characters to describe human connection via emotion, Dickinson, in her poem “There’s a certain Slant of light,” uses a different rhetorical approach by utilizing the inclusive “we” pronoun throughout her poem to highlight the emotional link between the human narrator and reader of her poem. In the lines “Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—” (Dickinson line 5) and “An imperial affliction / Sent us of the Air—” (Dickinson lines 11–12), Dickinson utilizes the pronoun “us” repeatedly rather than the pronoun “me” to form a bond of shared humanity that links the narrator to not only potential readers but also to other humans that the narrator has interacted with; By using the pronoun “us,” Dickinson describes that, like the narrator, other humans experience this “Seal Despair” (line 10). According to David Beer, an Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy at the University of Illinois at Chicago, it is only through human emotion that the narrator and the readers of “There’s a certain

Slant of light” can fully understand the perception of the melancholic, wintery environment that Dickinson illustrates in her poem (111-112). This shared experience of understanding beauty in despair, an incredibly evocative human emotion, draws together the narrator experiencing the environment of the poem and the reader synthesizing the poem through the eyes of the narrator. Currently, Artificial Intelligence does not have the ability to readily identify emotion in the way that a human reader of “There’s a certain Slant of Light” or the human characters of “Goblin Market” are able to ascertain; however, AI is becoming more congruent with expressions of human emotion through intensive research. According to researchers at Tingshua University and the University of Pennsylvania, when primed with negative emotions, GPT-4 showed fewer risk-taking behaviors than its previous models (Zhao et al. 2-3); when humans experience negative emotions, they too also demonstrate fewer risk-taking behaviors (Zhao et al. 1), which was supported by a human control group in the study that behaved similarly to the AI when negative emotions were present (Zhao et al. 3). This similarity in behavioral responses after emotional priming demonstrates the need for literature such as “Goblin Market” and “There’s a certain Slant of light” that navigate the intricacies of human emotion to be studied in greater detail to determine how emotions impact creation, human nature, and social connection, and how Artificial Intelligence’s expression of emotion interrelates with the human expression of emotion.

Throughout the poems “Goblin Market” and “There’s a certain Slant of light,” Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson highlight that emotion is the cause of life and creation, is inherently human in nature, and is the common connection between human beings. Because of these three characteristics of emotion, genuine human emotion is difficult to replicate, especially with the use of mathematical reasoning. Likewise, with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence, identifying generative content as being human or AI in origin has become increasingly

difficult for the modern consumer online. However, studying poetry and literature, like “Goblin Market” and “There’s a certain Slant of light,” that describes emotion as a phenomenon that cannot be replicated, identifies a strong tool for consumers to recognize genuine human emotion and creation in the age of the internet. Studying human emotion allows for the recognition and appreciation of real, human experiences, like the sight of light flitting over a windowsill or the joy of human connection and empathy between friends. When presented with the unknown: Artificial Intelligence, goblin-men, or an oppressive “Slant of light” (Dickinson line 1), humans can embrace their emotions to process unfamiliar phenomena.

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Trevor Duke

A Band in the Bottoms

“It’s not every day you get to do something like this,” my dad whispered as he slowly turned his head, revealing a smile that covered his whole face. My eight-year-old mind had no clue how true that statement was. As far back as I can remember, each year, from September to February, my life has revolved around hunting. Every weekend for those five months, my dad and I loaded up the truck and made the hour-and-a-half drive from our house in Little Rock to our duck club in Casscoe, Arkansas, just east of Stuttgart. Three generations of Dukes and a few other men joined in the four-room cabin. Like my family’s dark hair, height, and Irish heritage, the hunting tradition has been passed from generation to generation. Someday, I hope to pass on my love for the activity to my children, exposing them to the same lessons I have learned and the wisdom I have gained while in the woods of the Arkansas Delta.

“Beep, Beep, Beep,” the alarm in the front room of The Hen House Duck Club rang out at 3:15 a.m. I sprung out of bed in the long, dark bunkroom and began pulling on my clothes. I heard my dad’s rustling of blankets and groans as he slid out of his warm bed and into the cold cabin air to turn on the lights. My grandfather shuffled across the front room floor from the recliner he slept in to turn off the alarm. In a flash, I was completely dressed and headed out the door while my dad was still in his boxers and rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Dressed in black silk longjohns, my favorite camouflage sweatshirt from Mack’s Prairie Wings, and house shoes, I hurried across the gravel parking lot to the storage room in the boat shed where my waders hung, their thick neoprene warm from the hot air of the boot dryer. I slid into the waders and waddled to the truck, climbing in the back seat for the short drive to the boat ramp.

At the ramp, I jumped out of the truck and rolled into the flat-bottomed camouflage boat, ready for the long, cold ride downriver in the dark. I lay in the bottom of the aluminum boat, amongst mesh bags of decoys, our backpacks, and my gun. As Jay Bird, my dad's best friend since high school, fired up the two-stroke engine, the air around our boat filled with the white smoke of burnt oil, one of those smells that you know is bad for you but immediately brings you rich memories. Jay checked to ensure everyone was wearing life jackets and that his kill switch was on before turning on his handheld Q-beam spotlight and aiming it upriver to make sure the other boat, where Ryno, his daughter AP, and her friend were, was ready to go. Just like that, we took off. The clean, fresh air rushed over the boat as we raced downriver. It found every gap and crack in my clothing with the desire to chill me to the bone. The forty-horse Mercury roared, and Jay swung his spotlight from bank to bank of the muddy river. I closed my eyes to keep the wind out of them, and the next thing I knew, I felt the bottom of the boat run into a muddy bank. Everyone grabbed their gear, and we walked in the dark through the knee-deep water, moving expeditiously but carefully because of the cypress knees and fallen branches that lurked just below the surface, waiting to trip the uncautious wader.

When we got to the hole, my dad pointed me towards a giant cypress tree to stand next to and hang my backpack and gun from. Jay, Ryno, and Dad threw out the decoys and found their trees to hide by. Wings whistled around us as the sun silhouetted dozens of ducks landing and taking off from the cold chocolate milk-colored water around my legs. I looked up to see my dad's face smiling at me. He said, "Load your gun. It's almost shooting light. Hug tight to this tree and keep your face down until the ducks are in the hole." We stood in a semicircle, with the wind at our backs, each leaning on a tall cypress or oak tree, keeping with the world-renowned Arkansas tradition of green timber

duck hunting.

For the next hour, ducks poured into the hole, and one by one, as the bark of Dad and Jay Bird's calls convinced them to land on the water, I killed them. I could not believe how many ducks were flying through the small gap in the trees to land right before me. My dad's smile, which had started in the morning, never stopped.

I suddenly heard AP say, "Dad, I'm ready to go back to the cabin." Ryno audibly groaned. "Are you sure, AP?" he asked.

She was sure, and they began to walk out. Ryno's shoulders were weighed down by a strap filled with eight mallard ducks, AP's and her friend's legal limit. Two ducks hung from a strap laid over a cypress knee beside the tree I stood by. As I carried back a third, I noticed something shining on the leg of one of the green-headed mallards on the strap. "BAND, BAND, BAND!" I yelled. I grabbed the duck and held it up for Dad and Jay to see, and we all began shouting and cheering. Killing a banded duck is every duck hunter's dream, indeed a very rare experience, and I did it at eight years old.

The last duck of the limit floated through the trees, its wingbeats like cannon blasts echoing off of the timber in the silent hole. As I shot, I felt my dad's hand on my shoulder and heard sniffles coming from behind his camo face covering.

"What's wrong, Dad?" I asked. He immediately stopped sniffing, "Nothing is wrong, Trev. I'm just so happy you got to experience this today."

We picked up all the decoys and began our walk back to the boat. On the way, I looked around at all the trees and landscapes we walked through in the dark. Everything was so perfect, down

to the bright green moss on the oak trees.

As the water splashed around me, I realized what it was all about. It is not killing limits of ducks, seeing one come into a hole perfectly to your call, or even getting a band. It is the experience of being in some of the prettiest land on Earth and finding your mutual respect and love for it. While I have killed a dozen ducks plenty of other times, that hunt in the White River Bottoms is so special to me because, on that day, I learned what it meant to revere and respect the land that gives us so much. When the time comes for my future children to go hunting with me, I will experience the same thing my dad did, watching as his kid figured it all out in one morning and seeing the tradition cement itself in another generation.

Kristy Browning
***Console to Classroom:
Video Games in Education***

According to the World Population Review website, Arkansas, my home state, ranks number thirty-two in the country for public school education. On several social media platforms, educators across the country have been expressing concerns that students are not learning and retaining information at the levels they should be, thus making their quality of education subpar. Every student deserves to have the best education that can be offered to them. This includes implementing new and innovative techniques to strengthen the areas that the education system is lacking. One possible technique is the use of video games. Moderate use of video games can improve cognitive development and perceptual learning and should be implemented in schools to increase literacy and information retention.

The National Literacy Institute states that approximately forty percent of students across the nation cannot read at a basic level. Lack of literacy negatively impacts children well into adulthood. It decreases the chances that a child will attend college, which in turn increases the chances of them ending up in poverty. Video games can be used to help improve a child's reading skills due to them needing to read the game's instructions and in-game text to effectively play. I have actually used this strategy to help my six-year-old daughter improve her literacy skills. She loves the game Roblox. When she became frustrated with reading, I motivated her by telling her that learning to read more sufficiently would help her be able to read the instructions of the game, thus allowing her to be able to play more successfully. She often refused to even try reading books because of her struggle with more difficult words and comprehending the text. After just a few short weeks of using Roblox to reinforce the literacy skills she was learning at school and at home, she showed great

improvement in her reading speed and accuracy as well as comprehension. This same technique can be applied to other students. A major factor in children successfully learning how to read is finding ways to incorporate reading into their everyday lives. As quoted in Catherin Beavis' article, "Games as Text, Games as Action: Video Games in The English Classroom," The International Reading Association argues that children, "engage in multiple forms of literacy throughout their day. These literacy experiences may include the use of traditional print materials, the Internet, social media, instant messaging, texting and video games, all of which can be used as tools for academic content as well as forming social relationships." In the age of technology and social media, it is important that we use these tools to help improve our children's education. Using things like video games that they willingly engage in during their free time will make them more open to learning and increase the chances that they enjoy it and retain the information they learn.

Another way that video games can be beneficial is by helping improve visual detailing skills and perceptual learning. Perceptual learning refers to the way students see and understand the world around them. Having effective visual detailing skills is so important. A study was done on the effects of moderate video game play, and the results showed significant improvement in crowding acuity (one's ability to recognize an object in their peripheral vision), contrast sensitivity (the ability to see the details of objects, even in low-contrast situations), mental rotation (one's ability to mentally rotate an object to predict how it would look from a different angle) and many more areas (Bejjanki et al). These skills allow students to view the world from all angles and improve their focus, making them more suited for careers like pilots, surgeons, and even soldiers. In fact, this same study showed that several pilots and laparoscopic surgeons outperformed their peers after a short period of video game training. When you have people's lives in your hands, as is the case with these professions, having top tier visual detailing skills

is imperative. Equipping students with these skills sets them up for success in more intense career fields like the ones mentioned above, while also giving them a more thorough view of life.

An active mind is a thriving mind, and video games are a great tool to help keep a child's mind active. Certain genres of video games can help improve planning, organization, and flexible-thinking—all great skills that help with problem-solving (Belsky). Being able to think creatively to find solutions to problems is a valuable skill that can help them learn better and build confidence in themselves and their education. This also helps improve memory, which is essential for students to retain the information they learn at school. Encouraging creativity in students helps to make them more well-rounded, helps them to be creative, independent thinkers, and can even open them up to skills and talents they didn't know they had. Video games promote creative thinking and imagination.

Fantasy gameplay, choosing a creative username, creating an avatar, and even creating their own worlds all help a child's brain develop beyond the bubble of limitations we are often forced to stuff ourselves into. This translates to students who are more resilient and less likely to give up in the classroom. Essentially, we will have classrooms full of children willing to take on difficult tasks and find creative ways to learn and retain information.

Many studies have been done to prove that video games have negative effects. It has been said that they cause increased aggression, lower self-esteem, and decreased mental health. While this can be true, deeper analysis into this claim finds that this is most true in children who play video games excessively rather than moderately. The article, "Gaming Well: Links between Video Games and Flourishing Mental Health" addresses this claim. Christian M. Jones et al. argue, "While the negative effects of playing video games is well documented, many of the potential problematics of gameplay appear associated with excessive

amounts of time immersed in play and links to existing lower psychosocial well-being” (Jones et al.). Anything done excessively can be harmful. Reading books excessively can lead to strain on the eyes and a decline in social skills. Excessive exercise can lead to injury; the same goes with video games. Overall, studies support the idea that immersion in video games for two hours per day, or less, can be more beneficial than harmful.

Many studies have shown the various ways that video games can be beneficial to improving the development and education of our youth. From improving their problem- solving skills to increasing their literacy, video games have been proven to be an effective, creative tool to implement into our school curriculum and should be implemented at all levels. With time, consistency, and a well-implemented curriculum, video games can be the new frontier to an improved, efficient education system.

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Lauran Stillman

The Power in Our Hands

Through commercials, advertisers present an idealized version of ourselves that we can achieve with their products. By incorporating elements of fantasy into their narratives, many advertisements transform the consumer's perspective from purchasing a product to buying into an enhanced version of themselves. This approach captivates the audience but also builds a deeper connection between the brand and the consumer. "The Power in Our Hands," an advertisement first aired by The Home Depot on April 29, 2024, illustrates this by emphasizing the empowerment that can come from using Home Depot's products. The deeper message being communicated is that using Home Depot's products helps women become more self-reliant and capable, allowing them to achieve their goals and empower future generations.

To convey this message to the audience, the advertisement features scenes of women completing home projects using a range of The Home Depot's tools and materials, from power drills to gardening supplies. Women are shown painting rooms, creating garden beds, building canvas frames, and more. The series of short clips is underscored by uplifting background music and a voice-over that emphasizes the satisfaction that comes from accomplishing these tasks. The ad displays moments of transformation and ends with a montage of accomplished women taking in the finished projects and showing younger girls how to develop their building skills as well.

The ad effectively appeals to its target audience of women by highlighting female empowerment and strength. Given the diverse group of women, tools, and projects shown the viewer can easily see herself in the same role as the women in the commercial. These visuals resonate with women by showing their

capability and independence in traditionally male-dominated activities. The commercial captures the audience's attention while instilling a sense of pride and motivation through the powerful language used in the voiceover. This approach aligns with the broader theme of female empowerment and encourages women to harness their own power, effectively achieving the commercial's purpose of inspiring and uplifting its viewers.



Figure 1: Screen capture of "The Power in Our Hands"

The ad uses emotional appeals to create a connection with its audience. Overlaying the scenes of women working with strong language such as “power,” “motivation,” and “confidence” is intended to inspire viewers to take on their own projects. The ad suggests that Home Depot provides their customers with the resources and support needed to complete their tasks successfully by highlighting the pride and determination of the women using their equipment. The commercial also emphasizes the importance of building skills to pass to “future generations,” which particularly appeals to mothers. The ad suggests that, even if women do not learn to build for their own benefit, they should acquire these skills to pass to their children, further leveraging

an emotional appeal. This combination of encouraging language and the focus on legacy resonates with women, making them feel empowered and valued.

Another element in the ad that stood out to me is the phrasing and tone of the dialogue. The woman in the voiceover uses a soft and inviting voice while repeatedly using the word “we” to establish a feeling of community. This inclusive language, combined with the gentle tone of the narrator, supports the sense of welcome and safety their brand wants to create for women. This approach not only strengthens brand loyalty but also encourages more women to engage in home improvement projects. While in reality taking on DIY projects can be a potentially frustrating experience, this ad portrays it as positive and rewarding with the assistance of Home Depot. This approach aligns with the broader theme of female empowerment and encourages women to recognize and harness their own power, achieving its purpose of inspiring and motivating viewers.

In summary, “The Power in Our Hands” effectively uses fantasy and idealization to create a compelling narrative for women interested in developing their home improvement skills. The deeper message of empowerment and capability encourages women to achieve their goals and inspire future generations. By showcasing the empowerment and self-reliance that come from using their products, the ad is able to captivate views and create an emotional connection with the brand. By looking beyond the product being advertised we are able to recognize the powerful role advertisements play in shaping consumer perceptions and the importance of crafting messages that go beyond mere product promotion to build lasting loyalty and trust.

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Brynn Nasello

Family Ties

When crawfish are boiled, they can't tell the difference between the boiling water and the calm stream they were caught in. At least, that is what my grandfather always told me whenever we had crawfish for dinner. It reassured my mind as a kid, even if deep down I knew it was not true. Their dark red shells would shine in the bubbling water, and hot steam enveloped my vision if I got any closer while my grandfather continued cooking.

When I was a kid, going to my grandparents' house in Louisiana was a rare treat. They always showered my sister and me with gifts and exclamations of how much taller we were. Their house seemed like it was a magical place; the many trinkets my grandmother collected supplied hours of entertainment and wonder for my sister and me. Simple plastic fridge magnets were now prized possessions when we plucked them off the ever-humming fridge. The decades-old grandfather clock rang gently in our ears, announcing dinner, and the sweet smells of whatever our grandmother made became our beacon to follow.

As we grew older, though, the visits to our grandparents' house dwindled. My sister and I soon learned about the difficulties of family conflict and the distance between loved ones. My memories of my grandparents left a long-lasting lesson of love overruling time, no matter how long it has been since you last spoke to a family member.

My dad had a strained relationship with his parents, which, in turn, affected my relationship with them as well. Often, my sister and I would share memories of our grandparents, followed by an admission of wishing we could visit again.

“Do you remember the airboat rides we had with them?” my sister asked me.

“Of course, Grandpa would always joke about feeding us to the alligators if we didn’t go,” I replied with a smile.

Years later, when my sister and I had grown from kids into adults, our dad offered for us to visit our grandparents again. It shocked me, as I did not think it would ever be a possibility again. The ride there was long. As I looked on, cookie-cutter suburban houses turned into grassy fields full of cows, which slowly turned into swamps. The Spanish moss-covered bald cypress trees towered over our car as we passed. I occasionally reached out to touch the closest ones through my window to feel the soft, silky strands.

It was surreal when I saw my grandparents again. Their house was exactly how I remembered it, down to those magnets on the fridge my sister and I loved to play with. It was as if I stepped into a memory, a time capsule, but only one thing had changed. My grandparents were visibly older, which was expected, but a small part of me expected them to look the same too. My grandmother had shrunk; she leaned over her neon green walker to get around the house, thus also reducing her height. My grandfather’s wrinkles had grown, especially when he smiled and reached over to welcome us. We had a crawfish boil for dinner in celebration of the reunion.

“Do you think the crawfish can tell the difference?” I asked my grandfather.

“What difference?” he asked, confused, as he was busy slicing the corn.

“Between the pot of boiling water and their stream,” I

answered, and he just looked back at me and let out a loud laugh.

As a kid, your family means everything to you. The distance I experienced with my grandparents during my childhood left a lasting impression on my view of family and relationships. Even if years pass, you can still have love for someone. These connections we make during our lives last, no matter the time that passes.

Ruth Quero

The Most Unlikely Art Thief: AI

As I scroll into the art tag on Twitter (I am never calling it “X”), there are lots of creative works people have done. All of a sudden, there have been some users posting art made by generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) machines and calling themselves artists with the odd-looking fingers and objects blending into each other making up those types of images. Many artists have been criticizing people who make AI art. Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) can generate images/art by typing a “prompt” into the generator and it will generate what some would say that it “created art.” This is different from art being made on a computer because it requires a person to draw with the tools inside the program. AI-generated “artworks” and “artists” are stealing from human artists by not crediting and compensating them.

Many generative Artificial Intelligence databases are trained on other artists’ works without crediting or compensating them. The majority of AI databases are being trained on photos and artwork. To quote from The Economist, “OpenAI’s past reports show that its GPT-3 model was trained on sources including the Common Crawl; These training data are broken down into token-numerical representations of bits and text, image or sound.” They use the internet to find images to train their databases. They used artwork and images without crediting the original authors. Many generative AI companies “build their business by scraping or collecting images and other data from the internet, including artists and illustrators who aren’t credited or compensated” critiques illustrator Molly Crabapple. Generative AI companies are training stolen and copyrighted artworks for their databases.

AI databases are being trained on stolen artworks, and this

goes against copyright law. In January 2023, a major generative AI company known as Stability AI was sued by a group of artists for training their AIs on their works without permission. As stated by Johnathan Taplin, “So while human creators rationally explore and debate this issue, tech corporations are using their work to train the generative machines that, ultimately, may make the artists obsolete.” However, many tech industry giants and AI companies are saying, “There is nothing wrong with using other’s data to simply use for training their models...Absorbing copyrighted works and then creating ones is, after all, what humans do” (The Economist). According to The New York Times, “Some tool developers have said they won’t assert copyright over content generated by their machines,” and “Robots have traditionally been exempt from liability but “courts in the future won’t be so sympathetic to machine copying, according to a director of Stanford’s Law School Program, Mark Lemley.” In the future, it seems likely that generative AI won’t be immune to copyright infringement, as there are numerous lawsuits against AI art.

Many businesses are replacing human artists with generative AI, and this hurts the careers of many artists. They are doing this because it is a new technology, so they won’t have to pay their artists. According to illustrator Molly Crabapple on PBS Newshour, “There are companies . . . even a year ago, were hiring artists to do book covers...with those artists are now making AI book covers.” Craig Peters, chief executive of Getty Images, complains, “AI companies are spending literally billions of dollars on computer chips and energy, but they’re unwilling to put a similar investment into content” (The Economist). Therefore, this means that they are not willing to hire or pay artists since they are more focused on using AI for their graphics and illustrations. As many businesses are using AI over hiring artists, this is hurting their careers in the long run. They need these jobs to support themselves and their families.

Using generative AI can assist artists with their workflow. According to Dr. Rebecca Fiebrink, an artist and professor of creative computing at the University of London, “AI can enable completely new kinds of creative practices and creative works.” Another point Dr. Fiebrink mentions is, “There are benefits of artists of AI, essentially, giving people tools to get over some of the tedium of the production of art, enabling the disabled to participate and, actually creating a new kind of art in itself.” She makes another point that “In the past, people had similar fears when new art forms emerged. In 1839 . . . the painter Paul Delaroche saw an example of an early daguerreotype, and he declared, from today, painting is dead and, of course, painting didn’t die . . . Photography became an art form in its own right... there have been similar fears around 3D animation, music recording, and music synthesizers.” AI art can become a new medium just like when photography became an art form, assisting artists with their workflow, and making art more accessible.

However, the thing that usually makes art art is emotion. There is usually emotion during the process and in the finished product. That is something a computer or robot cannot do. Anyone can get into drawing, painting, or any other craft. It does not have to look perfect. You can just simply doodle or keep drawing the same subject repeatedly. You could always improve your drawing skills, and you don’t have to be the next Picasso to be considered an artist. There have been various times when people with physical disabilities were able to create art. The majority of the time, most of them are professionals in the creative field and some are hobbyists. There are many tools out there, such as special pencil grips, wrist braces, lap desks, and even using their toes to hold their tools, that help when people may not be able to use their hands that much.

Images and artwork generated by AI are harming artists by stealing from them without credit or compensation, and it is

affecting their employment. This might be considered a new art form and can help assist artists, but AI, however, is lacking in creating emotion in art. If you are worried about the livelihoods of artists, you can support them by engaging in their works, buying from them, and trying to use less generative AI, especially image generation.

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Triston C. Jones

Service Never Stops

Veteran health & safety is an important part of the United States of America. The “Service Never Stops” advertisement will show the feelings of a veteran who has lost one of his brothers in arms to suicide and ways to give a veteran that extra step to think about before they fully commit. He also talks about how when you join the military and retire your service never actually stops and transforms into your day-to-day “Civilian” life.



Fig. 1. The Brady Campaign. "Service Never Stops". Gary (Right) with his friend who committed suicide (Left). Date: Unknown

“Service Never Stops” was released on November 11, 2021, by The Brady Campaign. The advertisement follows Gary who has just lost a close friend who is also a veteran to suicide. Veterans have served and sacrificed for their country, often enduring intense physical and mental challenges during their time in service. However, even after returning home, many

veterans continue to face significant struggles, one of the most shocking being the high rate of suicide. The purpose of this advertisement is to raise awareness for veterans committing suicide every single day. The deeper message is that veterans are going through much more than what is just shown on TV and in movies; they are constantly at war with themselves, and giving them the help they deserve would make veterans and their families much happier. This ad and many other ads like this have shocked the United States of America and many other countries for decades due to how many veterans, foreign and domestic, commit suicide.

The veteran's friend, who is also a veteran, committed suicide, so this ad would hopefully raise awareness, and the veteran would give some tips such as putting their guns in a vault to give veterans and even normal people extra seconds before they fully commit suicide. Veterans are a very important part of the United States population and have served our country in numerous ways. The United States of America does not take care of veterans like it should. I have seen this many times in the past with people who are close to me and others that I know. The United States of America Veteran Affairs is the biggest problem I have seen veterans complain about and their reason for not getting what is deserved.

The target audience for this ad is all USA Citizens and Veterans, which is evident for two reasons. The first reason is that Americans need to know what the defenders of our country are going through every day and the constant war they are having with themselves. This advertisement also shows veterans and civilians that, just in case they are thinking or wanting to harm themselves, an extra layer of security holding those weapons would slow the entire process down. It would allow them to think, if not stop them from committing suicide altogether because every second counts. The purpose of this ad is to shine a light

on the situations going on with the United States of America's veteran suicide rate and hopefully decrease it.

The ad gains sympathy and the amount of sad emotion throughout the ad -- the way everything is set up and related, including the pictures being shown, the music, and him talking about his friend's suicide. Without this, it would just be a man telling you how his friend committed suicide without any emotion, and there would be no point in that.



Fig. 2. The Brady Campaign. "Service Never Stops". Gary reminiscing on old photos of him during his time in the military with the friend who committed suicide. Date: November 11, 2021

The music has a certain type of sadness, like music being played at a funeral to commemorate a person. The pictures show the happiness between both veterans, and then the camera changes to him holding a picture with him, the suicide victim, and another veteran. The position of where he is sitting makes it like he is reminiscing and telling a story to his kids about the good times on the porch. The way he speaks of his friend shows they had a good relationship, and it hurt him. He wishes he could have had that extra protection layer to keep him from shooting himself. They are related because the ad without them would just be a black screen with a man speaking in the background about it, which would not be as effective as this due to how personal the film crew got with him.

The deeper message is that veterans are going through much more than what is just shown on TV and in some movies; they are constantly at war with themselves, and I believe that giving them the help they deserve would make veterans and their families much happier. This ad, like many similar ads, shocked the United States of America and many other countries for decades due to how many veterans, both foreign and domestic, commit suicide. The ad aims to raise awareness about the importance of veterans in the United States of America, highlighting the lack of proper care and support they deserve. Gary shares tips on preventing or giving the person extra time to think before they kill themselves, such as storing guns in a vault. The ad targets all veterans and US citizens to highlight the daily struggles and constant war faced by defenders of our country, emphasizing the importance of understanding their experiences.

The ad's rhetorical appeal is pathos, gaining sympathy and sadness through its setup, pictures, music, and the speaker's conversation about his friend's suicide. The emotional connection between the man and his friend's suicide is crucial, as without it, the ad would lack any emotional depth and would not be effective. The text describes a veteran's emotional journey, highlighting the sadness and happiness he experienced with his friend, who committed suicide. The music and pictures depict the happy moments between the two veterans, while the camera shifts to the veteran reminiscing about the good times on the porch. The speaker's words about his friend reveal a good relationship, but they also highlight the pain he felt and the desire for extra protection to prevent his suicide.

Lastly, the main message of this is to raise awareness about the considerable amounts of suicides committed by veterans and civilians. This advertisement teaches us that you never truly know what is going on in a person's head until they are gone. This advertisement has shown ways to prevent or slow down suicide,

how veterans still feel like they are serving this country even when they are retired, and the effects of suicide from a friend's point of view.

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Juan Santamaria

Lone Wolf or Alpha Wolf?

Do you think you are good at what you do? Do you think the best way to get something done right is to “do it yourself”? Do you prefer to work alone instead of working in a team? Do you think you will succeed in life as a “lone wolf”? Let me tell you how a college contest changed my point of view and taught me important lessons about teamwork, and about the role of a true Lider. In my final year of law school, I participated in a litigation skills competition that taught me the importance of learning how to work as a team. Also, this competition helped me understand the role that a true leader must play to bring out the best in each member of a team and that every task in life will be better completed if you work as a team.

Let us go back to November 2006. I was in my last year of law school at the University of El Salvador, a public university with a high standard of education. The Council of the Judiciary (an office of the Supreme Court of Justice that evaluates the work of judges, but also the quality of education in Law Schools) organized a competition to measure the criminal justice litigation skills of law school seniors. That was the experience of my life!

The design of the competition was quite simple, but tough: each law school selects its best students, a fictitious criminal case is delivered, and fake trials are held with each law school taking on the role of prosecutors and advocates. A playoff system was used until only two universities were left in the final match. The teams of each law school had to be made up of five students. Each one would have to participate with a specific role: opening arguments, examination of witnesses, cross-examination of witnesses, closing arguments and one acting as a witness; exactly as it happens in a real-life trial.¹²

Law Schools signed up to participate, and my law school made the selection of the best students to represent the university. Fortunately, I was selected.

I was overly excited; I could not wait for the moment to participate! It was my opportunity to demonstrate everything I had learned, and to taste –even if it was simulated– the adrenaline of being on trial like a lawyer, and obviously prove that I was the best student in the whole country. But wait a minute! The contest was not to reward the best “student”; it was to reward the best “team”. Well, “team;” I did not like that word very much. All my life I had tried to be a good student. In fact, although it might sound arrogant, at that time I was a great speaker, and I was also highly active. I believed I could do well in any of the team roles, and my confidence was high. But the truth is that I liked to do tasks and projects on my own. I didn’t like working in a group because I thought that others were a burden, and that everything would be better if I did it by myself, but now I had to face one of the great challenges of my life: working in a team. I had to stop being the lone wolf and join the wolfpack. As if this were not enough, I was elected “Team Captain”, so not only would I have to join the wolfpack, but I would also have to lead it! Be an alpha wolf.

Let me tell you something about our “wolfpack”. Each member of the team was quite different. Daniel was a skinny young man, very shy, who wore huge glasses and always brought many books with him; Tamara was a 6-foot-tall girl, always wearing jeans and boots, like a “country person” with a very strong character; Yanci was a small, sweet-spoken blonde girl, who used to sing in the church choir and was an animal rights activist. What a group! After the selection, we received the case file and the notification of our first rivals. We immediately began working with our instructors. For each team member, a role was assigned. As captain of the team, I would have to do the cross-examination and take care of

the objections in court. Both things are often considered exceedingly difficult tasks, because even if you are prepared, it is impossible to foresee the multiple situations that can occur in a trial. Daniel would oversee the examination of our witnesses; Tamara would make the opening argument and Yanci the closing argument. We read a lot of books, watched a lot of videos, and reviewed a lot of court precedents on the case. Everyone did their part well, but when we all practiced together it was a complete disaster. We could not find our notes; we fought over the microphone use, forgot many things, and at the end of each rehearsal we criticized each other. After a few days, it was clear that we were not a team, and that I was failing in my leadership role. I was frustrated and blamed others and myself. It was then that one of my instructors asked me to talk privately, in his office. That talk would completely change the course of the competition and mark my life forever.

One of our instructors was a Judge with over 40 years of experience. Not only was he one of my closest mentors, but he was also a good friend. So, at the end of one of our rehearsals, he called me into his office. The first thing that came to my mind was that we were going to retire from the competition, after all the team did not seem to improve at all. I also figured that they could replace me as team captain, which made me even more nervous. My hands were sweating, and my stomach was churning, before I knocked out the huge red cedar door from which hung a sign that read: “Honorable Judge Morales.” To my surprise, the Honorable Judge Morales was not angry, nor did he intend for us to withdraw from the competition. He greeted me with a hug and offered me a cup of coffee. After the formality, he loosened his tie and told me “Son, we need to talk...”. With a paternal attitude, he explained to me that in life we all need to learn to work as a team if we want to succeed. Using the example of wolves, he helped me understand that we achieve success in life when we take an interest in the people who work with us.

“We selected you as captain, because we want you to lead and inspire your teammates, not to criticize them; An alpha wolf does not attack the members of its pack, an alpha wolf is interested in everyone in the pack having food and protecting them from dangers, you must support your team and they will follow you”, he said.

“How can I do that”? I asked him.

“Well, you need to know your team and then trust them,” he replied.

Those words mark my whole life. With a new attitude I began to strive to understand the qualities of each team member and to organize working pairs, each supporting the other in the areas where each was strong and weak. Now we were a team!

I discovered that Daniel had a deep knowledge of law and criminology. He was very shy but precise in his statements. Tamara had a great memory and a very firm presence in the auditorium, and Yanci had an educated voice with perfect diction, brilliant for an emotional and convincing closing argument. And after making them feel that all had great qualities, they also begun to trust in me as Capitan. It was Amazing!

The day of our first competition arrived. We felt that we were ready, each one knew exactly what to do and we trusted each other. Although it was a very tough first match, everyone did their best and although we made some mistakes, we supported each other. At the end of the day, I understood that the contest was just that: a contest, but that the lesson about teamwork, and the role of a true leader who was learning would last a lifetime.

After graduating, each of the team members followed

different paths, but each one succeeded in their own way and according to their qualities, but we are all still good friends. I will never forget that you cannot succeed alone in life, that you can be more successful if you surround yourself with good people, not necessarily the same as you, but with different qualities, and that a true leader must be humble enough to understand that he cannot do everything by himself, wise enough to find the qualities of each member of his team and charismatic enough to inspire confidence in his or her team. Now I am leading my own Law Firm, and I trust my team enough to go study outside my country for a while, knowing that the office will remain strong because my team is strong. I chose to be an Alpha Wolf, instead a Lone Wolf.

By the way, after three playoffs and the final, we won the Competition.



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