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2017

"Adventurous Activism"

Joshua G Adair



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The St. John's University Humanities Review

**“The Humanities As Activism”
Volume 14, Issue 1, Spring 2017**



“If you are not outraged, you are not paying attention!”

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The St. John's University Humanities Review
Special Issue: "The Humanities As Activism"
Volume 14, Issue 1, Spring 2017
Michael Carosone, Guest Editor
Design and layout by Michael Carosone

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

Previous issues of *The St. John's University Humanities Review* mainly focused on book reviews, essays, and interviews. With this issue, I wanted to do something different, so I also asked for personal stories and essays that answered the question: How do you define and/or use the humanities as activism?

In the middle of May of 2016, when I was asked to edit this issue of the journal, I said yes. But what I didn't say was that I truly didn't want to do it, and that I didn't think that I was capable of doing it. This was because I felt that I had nothing new to say about the humanities that had not already been said ad nauseam.

Then, in June, 49 people were killed at the LGBTQ nightclub, Pulse, on "Latin Night," in Orlando, Florida. And I knew that homophobia shot those bullets.

Then, in July, two more Black men—Philando Castile and Alton Sterling—were killed by the police. And I knew that racism shot those bullets.

For me, it was a summer of attending vigils and protests. And I observed that the various disciplines of the arts and humanities were explicitly being utilized as activism in the streets at these vigils and protests. Specific language on protest signs. Writers reading poems at rallies. Performance artists theatrically marching. Etc. The summer of 2016 proved the value of the humanities. Nothing more to debate!

This idea of the humanities as activism is not a new one for me because for many years, in my own work, I have been connecting the two. But I noticed that it was obvious that others realized that the two were inextricable. And that was when I knew that I had something new to say about the humanities, and that I would use this issue to say it.

And then Trump won the election.

One of the many wonderful things that feminism taught me was that the personal is political. I chose the theme of "The Humanities As Activism" for this issue of the journal because it is personal. It truly is that simple. I believe that in order to improve our current social-political problems, we must make use of the humanities as activism. The arts and humanities must be utilized as agents of change.

As I edit this issue, I keep re-reading two of Dorothy Allison's essays (for inspiration): "Believing in Literature," in which she tells us that "literature should push people to change the world"; and "Survival Is the Least of My Desires," in which she writes: "I became convinced that to survive I would have to re-make the world so that it came closer to matching its own ideals." I think that it is time that all of us start to re-make this cruel world. And I think that the contributors in this issue of the journal agree with me; they, too, are trying to re-make this world.

What you are about to read are forceful pieces that demand and deserve the same attention that we would give to any energizing speech at a protest rally. So, with your fists up, voices screaming, and feet marching, I hope that you enjoy the journey and movement that is this issue of *The St. John's University Humanities Review*. The revolution is coming and it is documented in this journal.

In solidarity,
Michael Carosone, Editor
New York City, May 2017

Dedicated to the activists, artists, humanists, scholars, and writers,
to the oppressed and marginalized,
to the victims.
Dedicated to revealing the truth.

"The arts [humanities], it has been said, cannot change the world, but they may change human beings who might change the world."
—Maxine Greene

**PART ONE:
THE PERSONAL AS ACTIVISM**

An Interview With Wazhmah Osman

Regina Corallo

Regina Corallo is an English Ph.D. student at St. John's University, Queens, New York. Her current research explores radical and experimental visual and new media performances by Afghan American artists as forms of posthumanist art. Before embarking on a journey toward the Ph.D., she served as an adjunct professor for five years, teaching entry level and advanced courses, including literary theory. She has been published in *Modern American Environmentalists* and *SCOPE Magazine*, and has presented papers on feminist and gender issues at several conferences. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband, Richard, and son, James.

Wazhmah Osman is an independent filmmaker, activist, and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Studies and Production at Temple University. Her critically acclaimed documentary "Postcards from Tora Bora" (2007) is a deeply personal journey back home to Afghanistan, in which Osman captures the impact of war and loss nearly twenty-years after her family fled the country during the height of the Cold War. Osman is a member of the Afghan American Artists and Writers Association (AAAWA), and is extremely active in her work concerning ethical feminist media ethnographies, global media and knowledge production, and the politics of representation. I met Osman in 2015 after working with the AAWA on a charity event I organized, titled "Afghan Writers for Afghan Children." As an Afghan American and member of the LBGTQ community, Osman was extremely vocal in the wake of the Orlando massacre by Omar Mateen. For this special issue, I talked to Osman to discuss the tragedy, and question to what extent her work could be a source for activism.

Regina Corallo: Wazhmah, the focus of *The Review* is "The Humanities as Activism," or rather, moments when the humanities can initiate activism. As such I would like to start there and then speak about your activist work around the Orlando Massacre. Can you please talk about how you see your academic and activism work overlapping?

Wazhmah Osman: It is a complex issue, that of being an activist in the humanities and more widely in public. Where does the desire stem from? Who gets to speak and represent whom? What are the structures that enable and disable activism in society? What does it mean to be an activist from a marginalized position versus from a position of privilege: a woman of color versus a white male? Studies have shown that even in alternative media, white men are still grossly and disproportionately brought in as experts.

Some of my favorite people are activists and my favorite academics are activists. They care deeply about issues and don't hide in their ivory towers but use their knowledge for the public good. That is one of the main reasons why I went back to school, to be able to contribute to and be a part of the public sphere. People from my part of the world, the global South and East, are often deemed as statistics and on the ground evidence. A highly educated individual in a position of power recently told me, to my astonishment, that we are not smart enough to synthesize information, and make broad connections and policy that directly impact us. Such beliefs also ring true of the marginalized and disenfranchised people of the inner cities and rural areas. I don't want to undermine the importance and efficacy of eyewitness accounts and personal memoirs and histories as activism. Yet the gatekeepers—whether in academia, media outlets, and other institutions of power of knowledge production—should also give us a platform to speak and write as experts especially on issues that we're trained in and are directly impacted by.

Here's where the question of objectivity comes in and is used to negate our expertise because it is assumed that if you are personally impacted by an issue that you are automatically not going to be impartial and therefore unable to rationally theorize on the matter. This is erroneous because everyone, including the white male "experts," has a subject position implicated in societal power dynamics that impact our worldview. So no one is purely objective. Second, to simultaneously speak from a position of academic training and knowledge, plus a personal place of seeing, experiencing, and feeling, is a much more powerful position and message. At NYU's innovative program in Culture and Media through the Anthropology Department where I learned most of my academic methodology, we were taught not

your traditional impartial ethnographic methods of observation and interviewing. We were trained to be fully immersed in the worlds we study, to listen deeply to our subjects of study, the people we are learning from, to let them take the lead, and be ready to throw out all our preconceived notions and preformulated questions.

The stigma with the personal and emotional stems from society's longstanding stigmatization of the feminine, as a way of keeping women in the domain of the domestic, while glorifying analytical thinking and rationality as solely the domain of the masculine. In my mind there is no divide between the masculinist notion of rationality and feminine emotion. The personal, emotive, and affective is not a handicap but an asset. As I tell my students, you have to feel it first to be a good scholar, activist, or human being for that matter. Think about the state of the world, the global refugee crisis, the rapid destruction of the environment, never ending wars, and a new revival of systematic hatemongering and oppression at levels we haven't seen since the last world wars. You cannot begin to fight all these injustices until you understand another being and their situation and you cannot do that if you lack empathy. Even anger can be productive when channeled and directed as an impetus for action.

In my own work I go back and forth in between the two modes depending on the context, message, and audience. For example, my documentary, *Postcards from Tora Bora*, is a deeply personal meditation on the impact of war, while some of my other films are less personal. The same is true with my writing, both academic and journalistic, sometimes I write more standard academic prose, while other times, I incorporate my own subject position and sentiments. People tend to relate and respond more to my work that is interspersed and interjected with the personal and emotional.

RC: After the tragic events of Orlando, you as a member of AAAWA spearheaded an open letter as a collective response condemning the “hateful homophobia” that motivated Mateen’s act but also the “rampant Islamophobia” perpetrated by mass media and political pundits. So not only are you condemning physical acts of violence but also rhetorical violence. Given the attention to such narrative

resistance, how do you see these efforts as integral to mobilizing a more productive national conversation?

WO: Rhetorical violence sets the stage for physical acts of violence. They work in tandem. Whether it's going to war in other countries or attacking people they disagree with nationally, politicians lay the groundwork for their violence rhetorically by generating fresh hate and fueling existing hate. It is a convenient smoke and mirrors way of detracting from their own policy failures and subsuming the disillusionment of the populace.

When Omar Mateen, an Afghan-American, tragically shot, wounded, and killed people at the Orlando gay club Pulse, we knew we had to speak up. The AAWA is one of few Afghan-American organizations in North America, and the only one to emphasize literature and art as a form of cultural and political expression. Our membership encompasses a rainbow of intersecting identities, Afghan-American, Muslim, immigrant, and/or LGBTQ, all sadly at the crosshairs of many hate groups. As marginalized people ourselves, we felt solidarity with LGBTQ and Latinx communities impacted by the shooting. Thus, our mission and message was twofold, to condemn both the homophobia and Islamophobia that media pundits and politicians continue to proliferate. Currently there are over 100 anti-LGBTQ bills and laws filed by State legislators circulating across the US.¹ Hate crimes against Muslims-Americans are also at an all time high.²

The media and politicians have effectively created a false binary and antagonism between Islam and the West, feeding racist Colonial stereotypes of Islam that have gained new traction since 9/11. Muslims have been systematically misrepresented in the mainstream media as innately backwards, misogynist, homophobic.

¹ "Everything You Need To Know About The Wave Of 100+ Anti-LGBT Bills Pending In States": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lgbt-state-bills-discrimination_us_570ff4f2e4b0060ccda2a7a9

² Lichtblau, Eric. "Hate Crimes Against American Muslims Most Since Post-9/11 Era." *The New York Times* 17 Sept. 2016. *NYTimes.com*.

The hatemongers via the media were also quick to erase Mateen's Americanness. He was just as much American as Afghan. His internalized homophobia and dangerous ideas of masculinity came just as much from his American upbringing including the valorization of violence in our movies and video games. There are plenty of us who come from Muslim countries who do not become radicalized in extreme Islam. Why do the media and politicians continue to make these sweepingly grand and completely false assertions that we're all that way? Why is there not a ban on white men with guns in this country? Statistically they are the biggest homegrown "lone wolf" terrorists. Why have we not succeeded in passing any gun control laws? These are very large conversations that point to rampant racist and xenophobic mentalities that are gaining new momentum under a Trump presidency that peddles a new political and social economy based on fear.

RC: The letter was posted not only on the AAAWA website but was circulated as a petition within many social media circuits and online news forums. Can you discuss the nature of the response and the impact it generated as a result?

WO: For a small independent grassroots NYC based collective not supported by any major grants or affiliated with any large organizations, we were able to generate a considerable amount of discussion in online and offline forums. Not surprisingly, after our statement and petition went public, the first questions we fielded by journalists were "why is Islam irreconcilable with LGBTQ rights and human rights more broadly?" Such questions are contrary to building productive conversation because they are premised on false rhetorical binaries that simplify all of Islam as monolithic and static.

We garnered more positive responses and a show of support from local communities and groups. For example, AAAWA member Helena Zeweri and I were invited to speak at a Town Hall Meeting at Judson Memorial Church in New York City as a show of solidarity with the LGBTQ community. Both progressive and conservative groups such as Women for Afghan Women (WAW), SALGA-NYC (South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association), Sakhi for South Asian

Women, and the Dar al Taqwa Islamic Center came together to discuss to how to bridge our differences and challenge prejudices. The result was a mixed bag. It's a nice thought to bring together people with very different belief systems under the same roof to create dialogue and understanding. Yet the reality is both dangerous and disheartening. The conversation that ensued was rife with love and understanding but also intolerance and divisiveness. How do you reconcile deeply entrenched beliefs including bigotry and bias? I don't know. Having said that, being politically active and building solidarity is the only antidote I know to counter hatred and prejudice, that way you don't feel so alone in it.

The Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, which is a broad based coalition of religious progressives, LGBTQ people and many others, has been exemplary in demonstrating the power of diverse groups joining forces to work together for shared interests. I would like to see Muslim leaders build similar alliances.

RC: Last question, who are some of your academic heroes and how have they inspired your work bridging humanities to activism?

WO: A crucial aspect of this question is the complexities of identity. By virtue of growing up partially in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the US, and traveling back to the region regularly, I have a foot in different worlds. This is what the postcolonial anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod calls the burden of being "halfie" and "feminist" scholar, "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage" (1991: 137). In our embodiment, the boundaries between the oppositional binaries of self/other, expert/subject, and objective/personal, all inherent in western academic methods, disappear. As subaltern people, outside of the dominant power structures, often subjected to unequal and unjust global forces, we are also hyper aware of the disparities in power relations and the politics of representation.

My fluid and shifting subjectivity puts me in a position of having to contextualize and explain on the ground cultural practices and issues to my western collaborators. I have been active for a long time in gender/sexuality rights and the anti-war movement. Throughout

the 90's I was involved with NOW, Feminist Majority, New Yorkers Say No to War, WRL, amongst others. In 1999, during the height of the Taliban regime, I went to Afghanistan to covertly film for the Feminist Majority's "Gender Apartheid Campaign".

In some situations, I've noticed even the best intentioned activist groups can exacerbate a situation due to a lack of cultural access and overreliance on a few English sources. They can be ill informed and out of touch with the on the ground realities. For example I had one situation, where a group I was working with wanted to include LGBTQ rights on our platform at a time when women lacked even the basic right to go out of their house without a male family member. I actually don't know if Afghanistan is still ready given that the situation for women has become much more dire since the US "ousting" of the Taliban from power. LGBTQ rights cannot publicly happen in Afghanistan until we first secure basic human rights for women.

In these situations, I'm mindful of not being what Trinh T. Minh-Ha terms an "ideal insider," "the psychologically conflict-detecting and problem-solving subject who faithfully represents the Other for the Master, or comforts, more specifically, the Master's self-other relationship in its enactment of power relations, gathering serviceable data, minding his/her own business-territory, and yet offering the difference expected" (2014: 68). Rather I abide by the cross-cultural collaborative model that my advisor at NYU Faye Ginsburg has been teaching and practicing for decades. In the ideal collaborative relationship inherent power differentials are acknowledged and knowledge is produced together with the utmost consent and input of the subject group. Whether I'm in the position of scholar, activist, fixer, translator, interlocutor, and/or subject, I am aware of the inherent power disparities, and try to negotiate so we're ultimately deferring to local wisdom and knowledge.

Additionally I often have to deploy what Gayatri Spivak calls "strategic essentialism." The strategy lies in that essentialism is conceived of as a temporary performance that enables a temporary alliance amongst subaltern groups for the sake of political action and agency. The idea is to pass, belong, and not alienate potential allies, essentially sacrificing your full self and broader goals for the sake of

the activist agenda du jour, which happens to be more pressing. Depending on the task at hand, I usually highlight some aspects of me and downplay others.

For example, when my ex-partner and I made the documentary *Postcards from Tora Bora*, we made the difficult decision not to be “out” in the film because we didn’t want to detract from the main focus of the film. It was also important to me that the film circulates in Afghanistan. In fact the best screening we ever had was at Lycee Istaqlal to a packed crowd of over 1,000 people, with many of the people standing. I’ll never forget when the lights came up, almost everyone was crying. If we didn’t make that decision, *Postcards* wouldn’t have had the impact it did, never mind that I would undoubtedly be banned from ever going back to my country of birth. The story of a mixed Afghan and American lesbian couple in Afghanistan would’ve overshadowed the story about war and dispossession. More than half of Afghans become war refugees. We wanted to make a film that represented that collective experience and also speak about the egregiousness of war more broadly.

This made a number of LGBTQ people I know and don’t know angry. Of course I wish the film were able to represent both of my communities and had been screened in international LGBTQ festivals as well. Perhaps in an ideal world that would’ve been possible, but the reality is, circumstances force us to make compromises and then we have to deal with the consequences. Lest we forget that for many queers and Others with limited positions and marginal status, “passing” is also a survival mechanism in navigating hostile environments. Overall based on my experiences “strategic essentialism” is an effective strategy but it takes a psychological toll on the subjects, because it never pleases everyone and can be confusing and anger inducing for all parties. It is definitely not sustainable as a long-term practice.

I Am Not An Activist

Angela Hooks

Angela Hooks holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, and is a Ph.D. candidate in English at St John's University. She combines her passion for diary writing with her scholarship, recovering and discovering unpublished and published diaries, specifically black women diarists from the eighteenth through the twentieth century. Know thyself. That's Angela's motto. She's a workaholic, and a lady of leisure. Angela is a literary artist, teacher, independent scholar, and a slow thinker. When she's not teaching writing or literature, she's writing. Her work—poetry and prose—appears in *Balanced Rock: The North Salem Review of Art, Photography and Literature*, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, and *Noise Medium*. If she's not writing, she traipsing through TJ Maxx or finding balance between body sculpting classes and weight lifting.

Weeks after the Trayvon Martin shooting, I emailed the Black History Committee asking if we too would bring awareness to the plight of black people in guise of the shooting. I was co-chair of this committee that hosted a one-month celebration; I was a contingent faculty with five months left before my temporary full time contract expired with no renewal.

“No,” was the response, “We are not the committee to initiate a response.” One of my co-workers, and friend, suggested I back away, don't stir the pot. I had five months left, and if tenure track became available, leading a protest would not be in my favor.

The faculty advisor of the political science club stepped into my office. “I heard you are the person to see about protesting, fighting back, bringing awareness to the injustice of the Trayvon Martin shooting.” The political science club wanted to rally. Compelled, I joined the ranks of the young undergrads desiring justice, and amalgamated those thinking we lived in a post racial society.

A few days before our rally, I asked all my students to wear hoodies on rally day. I sent an email to the English Department requesting they too wear hoodies. One professor confessed she didn't own a hoodie, but had a sweater with a hood.

On rally day, during student activity hour, students and faculty gathered in the lecture hall to discuss the concept of a post racial society, how media marketed the image of black males, negatively. A member of the local NAACP branch shared the survival rules if stopped by the police. She emphasized, black mothers and fathers, aunts or uncles tell their children these rules.

Afterwards, several of us marched around the campus, chanting “no justice, no peace.” One of my literature students recited a poem. For the moment, for the day we were all fighting injustice.

Despite this moment, I do not consider myself an activist. When I prepare a syllabus, and walk into my classroom I do not consider my work changing and shaping the world for the better. When I think of activists, Shirley Chisholm, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and Angela Davis come to mind—female advocates fighting for gender equity and social injustice that society ignores. Paul Robeson merging art, politics, social and moral ideology.

Years later, two things happened: one student asked if I were a feminist; another asked why black lives matter. I didn't walk in the classroom with an agenda; I presented a body of literature, in which women were not only unfairly treated but also invisible, from Henrik Isben's play *A Doll's House*, to *The Memphis Diaries of Ida B. Wells*, to Sander Cisneros's “Only Daughter.” I hadn't labeled myself a feminist. I believe men should still pick up the check, hold the door, and mow the lawn. Despite the progress women have made throughout the centuries, women continue to fight for equality. Hence, do black lives matter? Black lives have always mattered, since Ida B. Wells' writing about the injustice and horrors of lynching black men and women.

Women Matter. Black Lives Matter. Fair and equal treatment matters. This is why my syllabus includes Sherman Alexie's stories and poems of the Spokane Tribe, Edwidge Danticat's “Wall of Fire Rising,” and why I prefer to teach the plays of August Wilson rather than Shakespeare. When I walk into the classroom, I want my students to find their own passion, their own truth about humanity, using literature as a tool.

Perhaps, I am an activist.

**Thoughts On The Shooting In Orlando:
Autobiography As Activism**

Anwar Uhuru

Anwar D. Uhuru is a Ph.D. candidate at St. John's University in the English Department. His dissertation, *Race Thought: Ethics of Race and Literature in the 18th Century*, is an analysis of how modes of valuation are used to dismiss racially marginalized subjects in 18th century literature. Anwar currently teaches at New York City College of Technology in the African American Studies Department, where he regularly teaches courses in Philosophy and Religion, African American Literature, African American History, and African Folklore.

The idea of writing as a form of resistance for communities of color is older than the United States Declaration of Independence. Whether one reads the writings of Ottobah Cugoana, David Walker, Maria Stewart, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Amy Tan, Gloria Anzaldua, Maya Angelou, or Alice Walker the intersection of the self and the polemic are ways to fight within spaces that are both isolating and hierarchical for those in the margins. It is the inclusion of the self that allows for those that will read the words written from the perspective of those within the margins that systems of hierarchy can begin to be dismantled.

While attending a conference titled "Queer Disruptions," I sat at a round-table discussion and the topic was "The State of Queer People of Color after the Pulse Massacre." Pulse was an LGBTQI nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in which 49 were killed and an additional 53 were wounded. The person who actually committed this unbelievable act was Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old, Afghan American originally from Hyde Park, Queens, New York; who according to investigations was battling internalized homophobia. The shooting is one of the worst examples of crying out for help. It was alleged that Mateen would arrange sexual encounters via mobile phone apps in order to have sexual encounters with men. It was alleged that Mateen's father and culture planted the seeds of internalized homophobia. It was alleged that Mateen would repeatedly hear countless homophobic statements such as, "Gay people should be killed." Whether that is

proof or non-proof of this deadly rhetoric, it will not bring back the dead, heal the wounded, nor will it bring a sense of stability to Mateen. Instead, his action only heightened the anti-Islam rhetoric that has been suffocating our ears and minds since the attacks on September 11, 2001.

The victims of the shooting were mostly Latinx in a part of the country that has a large Latinx population. Yet, their daily marginalia prior to and after the massacre only raises the level of erasure in regards to their status of citizenry and visibility within and outside of the LGBTQI community. It doesn't make those that are socio-political minorities feel safe either. As a queer identified Black man, it only made me want to stay home and stare outside my window as the summer unfolded before my eyes. I could easily retreat to the excuse that I am writing a dissertation, teaching during the summer, or that I am on a budget that is abysmal by all accounts. However, the truth is, it made me face the amount of violence that I have been exposed to since I was 8 years old because I was not like the other children. The first time I was called a faggot, I was in gym class and all of the boys said "you didn't throw the softball as far as you could have because you're a faggot." That was my initiation to routine verbal and physical taunts during and after school. If it wasn't my not-yet-discovered sexuality, it was the fact that my grandmother gave me books and didn't allow me to speak and/or use improper grammar, which was taunt number two: "you talk like a white boy."

It didn't help that my home life was saturated with patriarchy and the fact that comments like "oh, you remember so and so, he had so much sugar in his tank" or "I used to work with this guy who was sweeter than peach cobbler and he died of 'the AIDS.'" Followed by "That's what happens to those people." I endured this routine initiation for nearly two years until I began developing severe stomach aches and my mother had to rush me to a children's hospital. The doctor asked "What is going on at home that would cause this level of stress in a child this young?" My poor mother, doing the best she could, was stuck with the worst look a young mother could have come across her face. It is the look of both failure and fear. That look that is battling tears, anger, and defeat because she, like countless others, is trying to make a way out of no way. Mama was battling her own suppressed trauma(s): a

rape that happened when she was 15 years old that resulted in being prescribed anti-depressants. Becoming a teen mother by a man who took one look at his three-day old son (me) and never came back again. A drug addiction, which due to a threat from her mother, she chose to go to a 7-day detox program, in which she sobered up but did not clean-up. A husband who had a drug addiction, and two other children. Mama was just trying not to drink herself into a stupor or have a meltdown. Now this, a child that had the stress level of a business exec that works 60-80 hours per week. Instead, she said, "I don't know what's wrong. Maybe it's because he reads so much and asks questions about EVERYTHING." The doctor with a look of relief replied, "Oh, he is quite articulate." That wasn't close by a long shot. I read to escape my reality. I felt like my reality was my cross to bear because I wasn't like the other children who, just for appearance sake, made their parents' lives a little easier. It was bad enough that we were black, working-class, and we had issues that were practically public on our block. Now, the stigma of having a son that displayed the signs of being "that way."

Like many LGBTIQ youth, I either pretended or learned how to disappear. Disappearing is when you don't speak as much and you work to not stand out. All while praying for your high-school graduation and or your 18th birthday. So, you can have the ability to move away. If you can pretend, you develop hyper-feminine or hyper-masculine performative behavior that makes you the ideal image of what it is to be a man or woman. I wasn't able to pull either off. I like reading, theater, film, and the arts, which I would later realize created an outlet and escape. I could imagine and contemplate beauty in a world that was so ugly. I would discover later that if I had focused on being hyper-masculine, in regards to everyday performance or grooming myself to be an athlete, that level of commitment comes with an even larger price. Consequently, my scars which were internal began to become external. By the time I began to transition from child to teen, my mother had left my stepfather, and I began to gain weight because I had to assume the responsibilities of running a household because I was living with my stepfather's parents in effort to stay with my siblings. I wasn't able to actively burn off steam and so food became my only way to cope. I didn't have the language to identify depression and trauma, nor did anyone in my family. It wasn't until years later that my

grandmother and mother began to tell our stories OUT LOUD, which came as result of my mother having a relapse, and we realized how the pathology repeated itself.

It wasn't until my mother's mother articulated that she by herself raised three girls, that all of her children had different fathers, that she battled issues with alcohol, that she lost her first child at 22 months of age, and that she got therapy. My mother told me the gruesome story of not only being raped at 15, but what her uncle had done to her and her sister when she was eight years old. Her uncle would routinely beat her and her sister with a belt and he would sexually molest her. It is no wonder that she resulted to drugs and alcohol, and that family members would either look at her with disgust or treat her as if she was a person with special needs. It wasn't until I had moved away, finished college, had very unhealthy romantic relationships, along with allowing myself to be verbally insulted and abused for being too tall, too attractive, and the right shade of brown, that I got some time on the couch. It was through doing the work that I was forced to face all the years of damage and that I was taught to internalize my pain. I didn't realize that when you do not say what's wrong it will find ways to show up on you or through your actions.

I never had the opportunity to talk about the taunts that began when I was eight years old, from children at school, or the things that happened at home. I never told anyone that I was a victim of a hate crime in college when the words "Anwar is a Faggot" were scrolled on the walls of the first-floor lounge in my college dormitory. I didn't tell anyone about the time when I was called a "stupid nigger" on Fire Island because I would not accept the sexual advances of an older, wealthy white man, who owned one of the largest houses on the island. I remained silent during the countless times that I was sexually pursued or groped by white men who either asked or insinuated the size of my penis, in order to fulfill their black Mandingo myth. I didn't tell anyone the amount of times that when I was the only person of color in a predominately white space the amount of "liberal racist remarks that were said to my face."

I say all that to say that I will never condone what Mateen did. But I do know what can happen when you suppress your hurt. It was said in an article that, despite the fact that Mateen was divorced and

engaged, he resorted to extremist Islamic views because of his socialization. It was also said in numerous news outlets that he did have anonymous sexual encounters and that his scheduled sexual meet-ups weren't always successful because he was often rejected for being too "ethnic looking," or that he wasn't what they were looking for.

The racist rhetoric that is inflicted onto the Muslim community creates an image of what a Muslim looks like despite the fact that the person might not be Muslim. It also excludes those that are Muslim. For example, there is a film called *Naz and Malik* that centers around two black queer Muslim teens that are trying to hide their sexuality and at the same time are being followed by an FBI agent. There are also queer Muslim activists that are fighting to end the stigma and criminalization within their own community. How do you think they felt when they watched and read about what happened that night at Pulse in Orlando, Florida? How do you think they felt about their friends and possible partners who are Latinx and Black?

It wasn't until the day of that talk that for the first time I was in a space where I could talk about my reaction to this horrible chapter in history. It wasn't until I heard the words of the Latina women at the table that I realized that my story, although it has its scars, isn't as difficult as those who are Latinx because of the placelessness that Puerto Ricans face due to America's current occupancy of their island. It wasn't until I sat there that I had permission to speak about my hurt. The morning after the shooting two of my sister-friends called to say "Are you okay?" It was the first time in my life that I was acknowledged for having a sexuality and an allegiance to a community. My sexuality, although known, was never discussed out of genuine concern. It was either fetishized, or used as a litmus test that only fueled a distorted patriarchal heteronormative agenda. The roundtable discussion gave me a sense of hope because two allies, a tall black man and a distinguished black woman, asked, "Do people still check on you?" I said, "The two that called me the morning after the shooting do but that's all." They shook their heads and said, "We straight people need to do better." I said, "What you are doing now is a huge start."

**PART TWO:
ACTIVISM IN THE CLASSROOM**

Adventurous Activism

Joshua G. Adair

Joshua G. Adair is an Associate Professor of English at Murray State University, where he also serves as Director of the Racer Writing Center and Coordinator of Gender and Diversity Studies. His work has appeared in *Harlot*, *Notches*, and in numerous academic journals. His current project, *Defining Memory: Local Museums and the Construction of History in America's Changing Communities* (2nd edition, edited with Amy K. Levin) will appear from Rowman and Littlefield later this year.

For several years now, I have been troubled by many students' seeming lack of agency and initiative. For the vast majority, waiting to be told when, how, and where they should be doing something has become the norm; asking why becomes an afterthought if the thought ever arrives at all. As a professor of both English and Gender & Diversity Studies, I found this especially true in my English courses, no matter the content. We cannot enliven and/or sustain the humanities if our students conceive their chosen field of study as dry and dead; if they do not grasp the immediacy and necessity of literature, I believe, our hopes are dim. To combat this trend, I require my students to "Choose Your Own Adventure," as part of all my classes.

This assignment started in my Gender & Diversity Studies introduction course after I caught a local news story one night in which a former student—a young woman from Korea—was talking to a reporter about her despair over having discovered that she and her friends were being mocked and derided as a targeted group on social media. Numerous students on campus had been taking pictures of specific groups (international, black, and Latinx students) and then posting them to Twitter and Facebook feeds with despicable captions designed to isolate, ridicule, and belittle. The story infuriated me and the next day I marched into my classroom demanding my students address the issue. They did: several joined forces to get the Twitter feed shut down; some made protest paraphernalia; others organized educational programs in their dorms. In short, a movement, with points attached, was born.

In the intervening semesters, I have made “Adventure,” a required assignment with few guidelines; students must engage in activism of some form that can be demonstrably connected to our course content. The rest is up to them. In a recent semester, one student noticed the defaced fliers and felt outraged that someone felt entitled to denigrate a campus event designed to build bridges and start dialogue about the Islamic faith. We were in the midst of studying constructions of the Other, and when she saw this disrespectful graffiti she knew she had found her adventure. Within minutes, she posted photos of the fliers to social media, asking her friends to help remove any vandalized fliers. She delivered the marred copies to our Dean's office and requested clean versions to re-hang. She did not stop there; she held onto one copy and headed to the office of the University's President, and requested to see him. As luck would have it, he overheard her request and emerged to investigate. When he learned the details, he accompanied her to the “Hijab Day” event and posed for a picture with the young women trying out the headwear; he then posted the photo to the University's social media.

These “adventures” snowball: when this particular woman returned to class with her story and photographic evidence of all she had accomplished in just a few hours, we were all impressed and inspired to follow suit. Our discussion of the Other was enlivened in new and productive ways as we no longer traded in abstract concepts; rather, we confronted a real world application of this important concept. Furthermore, for students who frequently think—for better or worse—that their work is reading and writing, often in a cloistered environment, their trajectories suddenly became more animated, dynamic. This is not an opportunity I could have engineered for them, though the lesson is invaluable and life-altering. The best I can do is immerse them in key humanities concepts and then insist that—utilizing moxy, passion, ingenuity, and intellect—they devise their own adventurous activism, rendering us humanities activists in the process.

Activism Inside A Kuwaiti Classroom

Shahd Alshammari

Shahd Alshammari is an Assistant Professor of English Literature. Her research interests include Disability Studies, Women's Studies, and Critical Race Theory. She has published creative fiction in journals, such as *Pomona Valley Review* and *Sukoon*. Her first collection of short stories, *Notes on the Flesh* (2017), deals with illness and identity in the Middle East.

I teach undergraduate literature at a university in Kuwait. I was always aware of the ways in which literature could enlighten, advocate for change, and save people. I am aware of this in a very theoretical sense, never in a practical and real sense. David Shields' *How Literature Saved My Life* is perhaps the most apt title for my experience with studying and later teaching literature. I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at eighteen years old, and this both limited and enhanced my understanding of life, the body, society's expectations, and stigma surrounding women and individuals with disabilities.

In literary texts and critical theory, I found a deeper understanding of womanhood, sexism, and ableism. Disability Studies and Gender Studies saved my life. I was able to cope with my body and formulate a different, less shamed, identity. Slowly, I recognized, using critical terminology, that it was society that was disabling and oppressive. My job was to break free, to "speak up," and to write the body. I started writing illness narratives, using both creative writing and academic scholarly discourse. Still, this was theory. Only when I stepped into the classroom did I find myself feeling the adrenaline of liberation. It was through my students, not simply through my own experience, that I finally tasted the activism in the humanities.

When I taught a Women's Studies course for the first time, I was afraid of the students' reactions. The majority of my students were of course Kuwaiti, Muslim, heterosexual, and able-bodied. It worried me, the idea of teaching them so boldly about minority groups, feminism, sexism, racism, ableism, sexuality, and other "taboo" topics. The disclaimer at the beginning of the semester was that the course material demanded an "open mind" and that the material might

challenge and disturb you. They were hesitant at first, but I soon discovered that, after only a few lectures, body language had changed, voices were clearer, and nobody was shuffling their feet, gulping, or uncomfortable. I had created a safe space. I shifted the classroom arrangement to a circle, rather than parallel tables, so that we could all see each other. I changed my position every day, telling them that there was a reason for this constant shifting and shuffling. Everything changes. Our positions change. We go from health to disability, from power to powerlessness, from lovers to ex-lovers, from children to parents, and so forth. There was nothing static or unchanging, and we had to accept the randomness of life. Our stories were always evolving, and our identities could not be contained in one framework or in one seat in class.

The more we read about different women's experiences—White, Black, Muslim, etc.—we were able to relate, to argue, to make sense of lived experiences. As eyes lit up, as my students developed confidence in their ability to speak, to “talk back” (I'm using Bell Hooks' term, here), I was sensing change, tasting it, feeling it in my veins as the adrenaline pumped into me, and as soon as the lecture was over, I had to say: “I have to let you go, but keep thinking about what we discussed.” We would leave the class reluctantly. I felt as though the gap between theory and practice was finally decreasing. My body would feel better, and my physical symptoms of chronic fatigue and mobility issues would take a backseat as my students' empowerment increased. It was my very definition of activism. I could teach. They could speak up. They could find meaning in their experiences. This was what “claiming an education” was and is all about, as Adrienne Rich wrote in 1977. I had claimed an education, years ago as a student, and today, I was passing on that power, that silenced gene, the torch, the light.

**“Remember When I Tell You This Story That It May Change”³:
Creative Humanities As Activism**

Kristie Betts Letter

Kristie Betts Letter is an award-winning teacher whose publications include *The Colorado Department of Education's Reader's Handbook: Reading Strategies for Content Area Teachers*. Her creative work has been honored by *Best American Small Fictions*, nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and appeared in publications, such as *The Massachusetts Review*, *Passages North*, *Chariton Review*, *Washington Square*, *The North Dakota Quarterly*, and *The Southern Humanities Review*. She vests her writing in history and the environment, which has been fostered by four National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships, and an English Speaking Union fellowship to study at The Globe Theater. Her artistic collaborations won the Jean Mellblom Sculpture award, and her collaborations with students led to a grant-funded environmental journal. Kristie teaches, writes, and plays much trivia with her family in Colorado. Read more at kristiebettsletter.com.

“I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is
truer sometimes than happening-truth.”
--Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (145)

When my students read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, we consider war, truth, and fiction not as separate entities but as facets of the human experience that cannot quite be separated. The idea of literature as an engagement with history is more than just a pale shadow or fictional recasting of truth. Tim O'Brien calls it “story-truth” and argues for its validity. When students understand the humanities as something more interactive, more in flux, as they engage with the historical narratives through their own experience, they reach the “truer sometimes” assessment of the story-truth presented by literature.

Their writing and interpretation moves them through time and topic, creating and continuing conversations with the world. The creative and the critical combine. The students play within the play by

³ Sherman Alexie, “Captivity,” *First Indian on the Moon*. Hanging Loose Press, 1993.

adding their own perspectives, not to change the original but to expand it past the Elizabethan age into the angst and indecision of the present moment. This year, the political machinations of *Hamlet* have never been more political; when we analyzed Claudius's rhetoric, students simultaneously analyzed Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton's charged debates. The process is the seed of activism. Students rewrote scenes from *Hamlet* on the current political stage in a creative reimagining, using pastiche as a critical processing tool. Engaging happening-truth by expanding into story-truth takes the political acts, the historical tracts and the numbers that constitute happening-truth as a site for creative engagement rather than something static. Sherman Alexie writes as the first line of his prose-poem "Captivity" that the reader must "(r)emember when I tell you this story that it may change." Alexie suggests that engaging with history changes history itself, that the creative response of "story-truth" throws the "happening-truth" into question. Thus, this literature engaging with history becomes activism.

In happening-truth, writing reshapes students' lives as they work to create their own narratives, pouring over the sharper edges and carving new paths. The story-truth reshapes the familiar through reflection. Re-visioning gender must engage the truth and lies of foundational stories. When my students read *Hamlet*, teenagers who hate reading have no trouble understanding the nuances of Ophelia and her potential madness. A good castle-bred girl who sings dirty songs to the high-ranking symbols of the society that denies her a voice? They get it. Asking students to gift Ophelia with theme songs or to rewrite her conversation with Hamlet results in a story-truth reaching beyond *Hamlet* into the present moment of politicized gender politics and personal expression.

They create gorgeous films, write pain-filled songs, and dance to reveal all that has been silenced. Their act of creation engages with Shakespeare's text in a way that goes far beyond mere analysis. The palimpsest they create writes their own struggle for voice on top of Ophelia's, creating a conversation. We explore the topic so key to understanding the humanities: How is art a lie that reveals truth? Pablo Picasso famously posed this question and in works, such as "Guernica," he employs Modernist distortions to reflect not photographic truth of senseless bombing during the Spanish Civil War, but fragmented

emotional truth of such destruction. Form shapes content. In the process, students explore the truth of the world around them and the history behind them.

The lines separating critical reading, creative writing, impassioned learning, and activism blur. In "Captivity," Sherman Alexie engages Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, re-visioning the very idea of who is held captive by whom, and in the process throwing primary source documents into question. To expand on the historical themes and activate a shift in perspective, Alexie invented a hybrid form. His prose poem uses the sonnet and adds to this restrictive form, resisting the captivity of the original as he resists the definition of "savages" put forth by Mary Rowlandson.

In happening-truth, Mary Rowlandson was captured by the Wampanoag, and in 1682 wrote America's most widely-read captivity narrative. In story-truth, Sherman Alexie re-visions Rowlandson as a woman at the 7-11, expanding time and possibility in his own poetic narrative offering a prismatic take on both captivity and on the fallibility of this best-selling primary source document. Through expanding the boundaries of happening-truth and history, Alexie employs his own activism. He adds not just a Native American spin on a captivity narrative, but a discussion of the "white man's rules" that govern the happening-truth of history.

I ask my students to write from unfamiliar perspectives, to emulate Alexie by putting poems into periodic table form, or to push critical thought through creative exploration. My students turn primary sources into poetry and examine history as a ghost story, combining the creative and the critical to measurable success. In class, in our reading, research, and explorations, we dance on the lines between truth and fiction, between self and society, between history and ghosts. Story-truth offers students an opening, a chance to be a part of reading as activism. With each creative engagement, students explore the passion for writing, for story-truth, for happening-truth, and for the electricity that comes when the student becomes the teacher, the teacher becomes the student, and the story becomes the truth. As a teacher, I cannot possibly imagine what my students will create for their final creative engagements with *Hamlet*, or for their pastiched poems engaging with a primary source document of their choice. Their ability to communicate

advances equity and compassion, as well as an activist's eye towards the official versions of a world whose facts and figures exclude women, alternate sexualities, or non-dominant cultural perspectives. Authentic communication, as well as creating more inclusive social narratives, depend upon empowering young people to add voices to the existing narratives.

High school and college students, like Ophelia and Sherman Alexie, already question the official "happening-truth" narrative. An interactive exploration of the humanities offers validation not just to the importance of literature and the arts, but to the importance of their own process and re-visioning. Research, reading, creativity, mentorship, and writing foster the most important educational tool of all: passion. As Tim O'Brien asserts, "(s)torie[s] are for joining the past to the future" (246). Harnessing student passions allows creativity and moves towards the activism that joins the past to the present, so that it can change the future.

**Wait For Nothing:
Beckett, Activism, And Why I Teach Literature**

Elizabeth Skwiot

Elizabeth Skwiot earned her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature with a designated emphasis in Feminist Theory and Research from the University of California-Davis. She teaches literature and composition in the Division of General Education at Colorado State University's Global Campus. Having performed in the circus between getting her M.A. and Ph.D., Dr. Skwiot's research interests include the intersections between art and performance in all areas of society.

In the current academic climate, those of us teaching in the Humanities face a bleak reality: courses cut, majors discontinued, and a call to justify the validity (even the financial promise) of our work. We struggle with these questions, not because we don't have answers for them, but because of the narrow, superficial thinking that causes them to even be asked. Yet the fact that these questions are being asked only illustrates the need for us to continue teaching literature, art, and philosophy so that our students (and yes, even ourselves) become accustomed to asking and answering difficult questions, particularly when such questions have so many possible responses. For it is in fact literature, art, and philosophy that aid us in formulating our reply.

In thinking about the current political climate in the United States, I'm reminded of one magical section of the "Great Books of the Modern Crisis" course that I taught at the University of California-Davis in 2004, during what I thought would be my last quarter there, having told the chair that I wanted to leave the Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature early, with an M.A., in order to pursue my circus career before I got too old. I returned to the Ph.D. program six years later to finish.

The final text we studied that fall was Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, perhaps as timely now as Orwell's *1984*. I can still recall the connection students had to this work and all they shared about how it made them think about their lives and where they wanted to take their talents. I am hard-pressed to think of anything more *valuable* than a young person realizing the importance of her existence and her

connection with others, when I know that we need engaged citizens thinking consciously about how to spend their time and intelligence. Neither can I quantify the value of being aware that there are forces who will want to enslave us, treat others poorly, and misguide us. Gainful employment does not account for maintaining a sense of vigilance for what is good and true and right.

Waiting for Godot is branded as “Theater of the Absurd,” but it is no more absurd than the world it seeks to represent. It makes no sense that two men should wait so long in the middle of nowhere for someone who is clearly *not coming*, or that Lucky is enslaved by Pozzo, when he could easily not be. But in the actual world, and most certainly in *Godot's* post-WWII context, real life proved far more absurd than anyone could ever imagine. It seems unfathomable, *absurd* that a Hitler could exist or that so many were killed for reasons so base and foundationless. Yet absurdity is not exclusive to Beckett's time, and one does not have to look far for the illogical in everyday life.

Activism has many expressions, but it always begins with a thought. We must keep thinking and asking the difficult questions, and we must compel our students to do the same. Anything else is most certainly absurd.

**PART THREE:
DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

**Where Digital Citizenship, Social Media,
And Activism Converge: @SoSadToday**
Katherine Rockefeller

Katherine Rockefeller is pursuing her Master's degree in English. She earned her Bachelor's degree in English with a Spanish minor from St. Joseph's College. During her time there, she led the campus English club as its president, founded a literary magazine titled *Unchained Muse*, as well as organized charitable book drives and other on-campus events, such as open-mic nights. She wrote an undergraduate thesis on Shakespearean gender criticisms. Her scholarship concerning Broder's use of Twitter has recently been published via the University of Michigan's Digital Rhetoric Collaborative (DRC) in a blog carnival concerning digital publishing.

In light of a shocking election, the tone of @sosadtoday's usually sardonic, casually dismissive tweets has undergone some alteration. Namely, she has become increasingly vocal in her political views, centrally her disdain for the Trump administration. Author and poet Melissa Broder openly suffers from and parlays a writing career off of fortunately manageable mental illness; she receives assistance managing the costs of her therapy and medications thanks to the Affordable Care Act. She uses Twitter to express her realization of the need for activism, whether it's sharing her gripes about the dismantling of the Affordable Care Act or acting as an advocate against issues that she strongly opposes, or sharing contacts of local politicians to her followers regularly, or encouraging them to call and make their voices heard. Broder utilizes the social media platform as a vehicle to express her disapproval of the current administration.

For author and poet Melissa Broder, what had once functioned as a personal outlet has become a political one. But in essence, how could the content not make such a shift in tone while her consciousness has been expanding as of late? Such a shift in consciousness is what now fuels her tweets, as she is currently utilizing her Twitter account as a vehicle to express her disdain for the Trump administration.

She acknowledges that her shift in tone and content can be attributed as a result of the current political state of affairs. Admittedly,

her content had already been emotionally and psychologically driven before the election, and her engagement in politics had been emanating from a consciousness of awareness. The formerly anonymous Twitter personality, @sosadtoday, spearheaded by the author and poet, typically embodies a digital consciousness steeped in existential, dramatic irony and inescapable, self-awareness.

These increasingly political manifestations on Broder's formerly a-political Twitter feed beg answers to the radically pertinent questions, such as: 1) What does it mean to be human on the Internet? (an identity that Broder is in constant exploration of); 2) Is it defined solely by the production of digital humanities?; 3) Further, is awareness of one's identity as a digital citizen contingent solely upon the publication of digital humanities, or are there other forms of digital engagement that constitute digital citizenship?

Broder has published a series of poetry, a collection of personal essays, and has a work of romantic fiction due out later this year. She also writes columns for *Elle* and *Vice*. Can actions like using social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to express dissenting viewpoints, or to protest philosophies with which one is diametrically opposed, or to engage the digital citizenry in order to organize effective demonstrations constitute digital citizenship? Broder regularly retweets activists' links to share information; for example, the recent airport protests. This point brings me to the heart of this specific exploration, which is what does it mean to be a digital citizen? Does embodying such an identity imply a semblance of authority or credibility? Broder's account was recently verified in September of 2016, which, from a formerly anonymous Twitter personality's perspective, could have compromised her artistic integrity, yet this dissent from her origins didn't transform her fans into critics. There is a denotation and, of course, a colloquial connotation associated with the term "verified" in the twitter-sphere, as it employs its own syntax, i.e. the ubiquitous hashtag, the discerning verified symbol. As we continue to define what our expectations are as digital citizens, does the contract of digital citizenship expect them to be activists, or to advocate for social justice? From this perspective, it becomes unclear whether Broder views her engagement with politics on social media platforms like Twitter as a social responsibility or

necessity. Further, the definition of which elements make up the unspoken social contract that defines digital citizenship on social media platforms needs to be un-obscured. An exploration of Broder's political engagement on social media, as a digital citizen, provides us with a semblance of a definition of digital citizenship. Through an exploration of her content, I seek to answer these broad, critical questions in the context of Broder's digital consciousness recorded on Twitter, and evaluate the social and political contexts that fuel her tweets and retweets, as well as the effects of such digital and political engagement through social media platforms on digital citizenry, and furthermore, how such engagement modifies the definition of digital citizenship on social media.

Once an anonymous, personal outlet, Broder revealed the identity behind her Twitter personality in a *Rolling Stone* interview in May 2015 anticipating *So Sad Today*, a collection of essays based on the aesthetic she has cultivated on her unique Twitter feed. Yet, the number of followers on Broder's personal Twitter pales in comparison to the amount of followers her Twitter personality, @sosadtoday, has. Arguably, her formerly anonymous Twitter personality garners more influence on the Twitter-sphere. What is the impact of the dissociation of Broder's person from her digital personality, especially considering her recent political activism on her account? It is difficult to measure the influence of a faceless digital citizen on social media. However, an analysis of the types of engagement, activities, or elements that constitute Broder's digital citizenship on social media can give us some insight. Broder tweets about her feelings concerning the Dakota Access Pipe Line: "cried about the dakota access pipeline for an hour in my parked car with the engine running"; The Affordable Care Act; and joined a trending topic in the wake of the defeat of the Muslim ban, encouraging digital citizens to donate to the ACLU. Broder, herself, tweeting a receipt email verifying she donated \$100 in the wake of the organization's legal opposition of the Muslim ban.

Besides sarcastic "alternative fact" tweets ("alternative fact: it's going to be okay"; "alternative fact: i'm fine"), or passively-aggressively calling out Vice President Mike Pence on his hypocrisy, quoting a tweet by Pence from December 8, 2015 vowing "Calls to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. are offensive and unconstitutional,"

sardonically commenting “same bruh,” her current manifestations of digital, political activism practically consist of what I have called “conscious retweeting.” Her series of politically engaged retweets include sharing a non-descript contact number, encouraging followers to “call [their respective] senators and read an excerpt” of a 1986 letter authored by Coretta Scott King urging against the appointment of Jeff Sessions for federal district court judge for the Southern District of Alabama over thirty years ago, and, in order to advocate against Senator Elizabeth Warren’s silencing in the Senate, utilizing the hashtags: #letLizSpeak and #resist, followed by #Sessions. She retweeted a user who encouraged digital citizens to “Call Homeland Security” in opposition of Steve Bannon’s appointment to the National Security Council, providing a contact number, and a script to read which claims Sessions’ appointment would pose a “threat to national security.” Further, Broder retweeted actress Rowan Blanchard’s tweet concerning the dangers posed to LGBT youth by appointing Betsy DeVos to the Department of Education. Broder had earlier retweeted, before DeVos’ controversial appointment, contact numbers of three Republican senators—Flake of Arizona, Heller of Nevada, and Toomey of Pennsylvania—in an effort to garner the one critical vote necessary to rule out her appointment as Secretary of Education.

Broder was vocal in her opposition of the Muslim ban, retweeting the ACLU’s retweet of Director of ACLU’s Immigrants’ Rights Project, Omar C. Jadwat, about avoiding complacency concerning resisting it, and retweeting D.C.-based news source, ThinkProgress, which tweeted a link to their website of a “list of protests happening against the #MuslimBan.” Broder tweeted in order to encourage her followers to tune into the Twitter feed of ThinkProgress editor, Adrienne Masha, to find a “very organized list of national airport protests” that took place on Saturday, January 2, and Sunday, January 29. Broder retweeted journalist Xeni Jardin with a visual break-down of the who, what, where, when, and why concerning the “national stay in challenge to Trump’s #MuslimBan,” encouraging followers to donate with the post script “PS: DONATE,” and including a link to the ACLU’s website with the legal document which they were presenting in court. The only evidence now of Broder’s generosity and activism are a retweet of singer-songwriter Sia’s initial tweet by Kate

Beckman, a contributor at *Cosmopolitan*, and a retweet from the ACLU's twitter declaring and celebrating their victory in the courts over the Muslim ban.

Broder regularly retweets Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour, Executive Director of the Arab American Association of New York, and associated with MPowerChange, a petitioning site specific to issues affecting the Muslim community. Sarsour's tweet, which Broder prudently retweeted, asks her followers: "Did you make your 5 calls today?" and claiming "It's working! Get on it! Stay engaged. Fight back!" and linked to the website *5calls.org*, which urges visitors to "turn your passive participation into active resistance." The political activism website claims "Facebook likes and Twitter retweets can't create the change you want to see. Calling your Government on the phone can." *5calls.org* operates on the motto: "spend 5 minutes, make 5 calls." With an app for iPhone and Android, as well as a call counter boasting 809,213 calls made as of 3/10/2017, it is easy to surmise that the website's rhetoric is making a commentary on the advent of what they deem "passive" social media activism, like that of Broder's on Twitter, communicating the idea that it is an inappropriate model for effecting any palpable, tangible change. The website reinforces this idea that digital advocacy is an inferior mode of protest or resistance with the claim that "Calling is most effective way to influence your representative."

However, this criticism of digital activism on social media is destructively dismissive because social changes begin in the society, and where do we live if not online as digital citizens? As a participant in digital-age practices such as these, Broder's digital branding of her @sosadtoday aesthetic speaks to the multi-modal manner in which we as scholars, educators, authors, and digital humanists consume information. Such an appeal allows Broder to the social media platform as a vehicle to actively protest the political concepts she opposes in real time to a following of 441.2K followers. Boiling down this argument into the efficiency of active versus passive resistance, their applications change when social media is factored into the equation. Passivity is to not make a comment. As a digital citizen, digital advocacy and protest is a form of active, rather than passive, resistance. Passive resistance, in this case concerning digital citizenship and expression on social media

platforms, would be not to comment at all; to ignore, or remain seemingly ignorant to the ongoing, developing, or evolving situation. From this perspective, Broder's recent digital political engagement, and that of a network of inter-connected digital citizen on Twitter, is critical. The advent of social media brings people concerned in common interests together who would otherwise have no mode of identifying interaction, or method of identifying such commonalities amongst these spectrums of peoples. In essence, this idea is what constitutes digital citizenship.

The aesthetic of Broder's Twitter feed, which usually concerns itself with anxieties about aging, mental illness, and explorations of sexuality in her open marriage, completely transformed itself to one of political agency during a turbulent transition of power, and such a transformation illustrates the extent to which responsible digital citizenship is necessary. To that end, Broder tweeted a link to *Indivisibleguide.com*, which houses *Indivisible: A Practical Guide For Resisting The Trump Agenda*, accompanied by the hashtag #WeWillWin. On its homepage, the website purports "former congressional staffers reveal the best practices for making Congress listen." Broder's engagement of Indivisible by tweeting a link to its website broadcasted the resource to her wide audience. Broder utilizes modern, contemporary, digital-age practices, in order to protest, and such techniques are measured in tweet activity, impressions, analytics, and other data. The impact of her digitally political activism can be measured in Twitter statistics that analyze how much of her audience sees such tweets and engages with them by clicking the links, commenting, favoriting, or retweeting her content. Such broad visibility wouldn't be possible without digital citizens engaging activist content, or sharing it on social media platforms, which provide an otherwise unavailable, novel method of modern distribution.

Ideally speaking, it's so artistic and poetic not to take claim for a movement you've created, but rather allow it to remain anonymous. Yet, after shedding her anonymity and accepting recognition, however, Broder went from an apolitical Twitter feed to utilizing the social media platform for purposes of social protest and activism. In a culture of digital citizenship, it is important to practice thoughtfulness by observing and respecting the differences between us.

And acknowledging and protecting our rights as a collective has become easier than ever in the digital age. Broder's work of exposing her political consciousness on Twitter is important because her activism creates an awareness that can help combat ignorance and hatred. Such tenants of conscientious activism are an integral component of the congealing definition of digital citizenship.

**PART FOUR:
ARCHIVING ACTIVISM**

The Citizen Curating Project Confronts The Pulse Nightclub Shooting

Barry Mauer

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Part I: The Pulse Nightclub, Orlando, Florida:

The Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting of June 12, 2016, is the worst contemporary mass shooting, in terms of the number of casualties, in United States history. The target was a gay bar on Latin music night. Most of the victims belonged to the LGBTQ community and the Latin community, though there were also a number of European and African American victims. The shooter, Omar Mateen, was an American citizen, born in the U.S. of Afghani parents. In phone calls with the police during the shooting, he declared his allegiance to ISIS. He died at Pulse from police gunshots.

The framing of this attack is of utmost importance. Was it an act of terrorism against the United States in the name of ISIS?⁴ Was it an act of eliminationist violence aimed specifically against the LGBTQ

⁴ Most terrorist attacks in the U.S. are carried out by Right Wing, white supremacist, and anti-government groups and people. See Department of Homeland Security's report "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment." Additionally, Muslims in the U.S. are far more likely to be victims of violence than they are to be perpetrators.

community? Was the Latin community also targeted, or was it incidental to the attack? Was it an act of self-loathing by a closeted gay man raised by a homophobic father? Was it the act of a mentally ill person with bipolar disorder, or the act of someone who was evil?⁵ Was it a result of patriarchal conditioning that teaches men to use violence as the best way to resolve issues? Was it a result of lax gun laws? Indeed, it appears to be all of the above, yet the various frames suggest different policy responses. To prevent another such attack from happening, we could combat religious extremism or the hatred of LGBTQ people and the hatred of Latino minorities, which was exploited by the Trump campaign during the period in which the shooting occurred. We could focus on improving mental health intervention, tightening gun laws, changing the culture of patriarchy, and so on. All of these and many more policy areas seem relevant.

But what conditions relevant to my life made this shooting possible? What responsibility do I have for the shooting? To address these questions, I look to my own process of subject formation⁶. In it, I see that my socialization is not so different from Mateen's. I, like Mateen, was exposed to American's national mythology, with its justifications for eliminationist violence. I, like Mateen, grew up in a patriarchal society, with its ideology of masculine dominance, its mood of anger, and its disgust for deviation from masculine norms. I, like Mateen, have relative autonomy in terms of my ability to believe what I want and to act out my beliefs, no matter how delusional. Mateen and I emerged from similar fields of possibility, though we manifested our being in different ways.

In relation to the victims, I also share much of their subject formation. Like them, I was interpellated into an apparatus of entertainment that encourages consumption and pleasure, linked particularly to alcohol, music, and sexuality. I shared the American ethos of free expression, of social freedom, and of "being oneself." I had never visited Pulse, but in my younger days I did visit LGBTQ

⁵ Most mentally-ill people are not violent, and, in fact, are more likely to be victims of violence than they are to be perpetrators.

⁶ See Althusser for a discussion of subject formation within an Ideological State Apparatus.

nightclubs and, in other places, was bullied by people who called me gay, though I identify as straight. I can identify with the victims.

My self-portrait emerges by noting the points of similarity between the broader ideological lessons of the society and my particular experiences of subject formation. It is metonymic; I am part of a broader whole. The policy recommendation follows from the self-portrait. To make a long story short, the recommendation I put forward is that the humanities needs to establish an agency for instantaneously monitoring our collective mood and then reporting it back to the nation. In other words, we need to monitor our collective's symptoms and suggest possible diagnoses; we need to take our Pulse.

Part II: The Purpose of the Humanities:

The study of the humanities has, at its core, a burning question: "How do I live a life worth living?" This key question raises associated questions, such as, How do I attain and maintain attunement, or a healthy connection to self, others, and environment? What is my duty beyond myself to collective being? Am I obligated to try to redirect my group if it goes in the wrong direction? If I am unable to redirect my group in a healthier direction, am I obligated to disassociate myself from the group and even to denounce the group?

Humanists address these questions through four interrelated projects:

Literacy is the ability to communicate within particular communities using specialized discourses. For example, advanced academic work requires new habits of reading and writing, such as asking critical questions and keeping detailed notes while reading, which do not come naturally for most people. My mentor, Professor Gregory Ulmer, reminded me that a pencil is probably the cheapest technology but the most expensive to learn to use effectively. The literacy required for becoming a professional writer takes years of practice and hard work to attain.

Critical thinking is the ability to cogently evaluate the merits of a text or idea. Without critical thinking, we are unable to function effectively in professional and civic worlds. We need familiarity with a wide range of texts and ideas to be critical thinkers. We benefit by

gaining many perspectives and gathering research from beyond our immediate fields of inquiry.

Self-knowledge was the first imperative of learning, beginning with the Delphic Oracle's instruction to Socrates: "Know thyself!" We attain self-knowledge by creating an inventory of our beliefs and behaviors, discovering our values, and checking for congruence between our beliefs, behaviors, and values. The processes for attaining self-knowledge come from many disciplines, including the sciences and the arts. The pursuit of self-knowledge shows us what we care about and why we care about it.

Citizenship means engaging with the world, balancing our growing empowerment with humility. The citizenship process is similar to the self-knowledge process since it also entails examination of values, beliefs, and behaviors, but of groups to which we belong, our traditions, and our collective actions and their consequences. By studying science, literature, and the arts, we learn what it means to have responsibility, power, and limitations in our historical time and place.

A humanist's goal is to bring people to attunement, which is a life in congruity. We can find pleasure from living in attunement, but it is not the easy pleasure of vice. Rather, it is the pleasure Plato identified as the reward for the lover of wisdom, a devotion that can also involve immense sacrifice. Can this pleasure be taught? I argue here that curating can deal with the difficult problems raised by the humanities. Curating is the selection of archival materials and their arrangement in an exhibition. The process of archival research and production can be imagined as a process of attunement, of orienting oneself to reality and acting to make possible the greatest wellbeing for all. We call this process the pursuit of wisdom.

A wise citizenry takes an active role in looking at its past so it can reason about its future. It must articulate its values, ask if its behavior is congruent with those values, and calculate the costs of its behaviors, changing them if necessary. Humanists use a range of methods in our pursuit of wisdom. These methods are found in the history of writing.

Part III: The Citizen Curator Project As Activism:

When we define curating as a form of writing, curating revises our understanding of both curating and of writing, especially as we change our writing practices in relation to electronic media. Just as the invention of the printing press occasioned new forms of writing, including Montaigne's essay, Cervantes' novel, and Ramus' textbook, information technologies that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries occasioned new genres as well, including Poe's detective story, Cortazar's proto-hypertexts, Breton's automatic writing, and Gyson's cutups. Each textual practice affords different ways of thinking and facilitates new possible identities, each with different values, behaviors, and consequences.

Curating, as a subset of writing, follows the history of invention with its own genres and logics. Our understanding of curating has changed significantly over the past half millennia. Curating began with the Renaissance "cabinets of curiosities," then advanced to the Enlightenment's museums with their classification systems, timelines, and scientific worldviews. Museums then incorporated re-created environments to convey a sense of context for their objects. In the industrial age, museums added participatory and interactive features to their exhibits. Early modernist exhibits incorporated reflexive perspectives, explicitly addressing the ways in which curating shapes perceptions and meanings. More recent "new media" exhibits have incorporated experiential and networked modes. Our understanding of curating will continue to change as technologies and institutions change.

The Citizen Curator Project⁷, established in 2014 in Orlando, encourages ordinary citizens to try curating for themselves and to approach the task as a form of public policy consultation. Curating as activism requires that we assume the identity of uninvited consultants who have witnessed catastrophe, deliberated about it, and wish to share our epiphanies and policy recommendations with policy makers and other members of society. Because curating has been crucial to ideas of community in the modern era—for example, museums arose with nations and reflected national priorities—we want citizens to think of

⁷ See the call for participation here: www.cah.ucf.edu/citizencurator

curating as another means of building and shaping community, a means of increasing their own agency within a more democratic and participatory process. The Citizen Curator Project invites participants from the area to create a series of exhibitions on various themes. In spring and summer 2017, we are focusing on the theme of "Eliminationism and Resilience." A particularly potent example of eliminationism, defined as discourses, actions, and social policies that seek to suppress, exile, or exterminate perceived opponents, is the recent Pulse nightclub attack, whereas the Orlando United campaign may be viewed as an act of resilience.

To promote contemporary civic discourse and engagement, we encourage projects that explore strategies for combating racism, discrimination, and eliminationism or other social practices that seek to marginalize others. The Citizen Curator Project facilitates creative engagement with local museum, library, and archival collections and invites participants to respond to the theme, "Eliminationism and Resilience." We urge participants to experiment, not only with a range of perspectives on the theme and historical source material, but also with the idea of what an exhibit can be. Anyone with an interest in affecting social change through exhibitions can be a Citizen Curator. This includes, but is not limited to, students, artists, activists, educators, and members of the community. No previous experience with curating is required.

Because our goal is to empower citizens through increased access and use of archives, we want people to imagine themselves as consultants, addressing themselves to policymakers. Thus we urge them to make powerful statements with their exhibits. Citizen curators need to learn the major elements of persuasive communication, including an understanding of purpose, audience, and context. Through our evolving *Guidebook for Citizen Curators*, as well as workshops, we include instruction in the major points of rhetoric and narrative, as well as instruction in curating practices. Additionally, as new technologies arise such as platforms for online curating, we explain ways to maximize the potential for citizen curating in these new arenas.

For this year's exhibits, we have provided the purpose or "frame" for the citizen curators. The purpose is to consult on the problem of eliminationism (and its obverse – how to promote

resilience). Eliminationism, a term coined by Daniel Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, described how virulent anti-Semitism provided the motive and drive for ordinary Germans to participate willingly in the mass murder of their neighbors and of strangers, including innocent men, women, and children. David Neiwert has provided a more detailed definition:

What, really, is eliminationism? It's a fairly self-explanatory term: it describes a kind of politics and culture that shuns dialogue and the democratic exchange of ideas for the pursuit of outright elimination of the opposing side, either through complete suppression, exile and ejection, or extermination. What distinguishes eliminationist rhetoric from other political hyperbole, in the end, are two key factors: 1) It is focused on an enemy within, people who constitute entire blocs of the citizen populace, and 2) It advocates the excision and extermination, by violent means or civil, of those entire blocs.

Addressing the problem of eliminationism means rethinking our public policies within many policy areas including education, law and policing, political access (particularly as related to gender, race, and sexuality), a decaying public sphere, employment, security, guns, suicide, violence and terrorism, religion, mental illness, media representations, technology, healthcare, public monuments and history, and other relevant issues.

Our research topic is ideology, though we do not usually use this term outside the university because it often produces misunderstanding and denial (no one wants to admit they have an ideology). However, we address ideology by identifying our personal and collective blind spots that contribute to eliminationism such as ignorance, intolerance, denial, delusion, and the desire for domination. In other words, we seek to identify our personal and collective blind spots and put these in our exhibits.

Our design is relatively open. We offer people the choice to select a mix from the list below:

1. Educational Exhibits: These exhibits seek to inform and educate the public. For example, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington

D.C. educates the public about the events of the holocaust, but does not present clear arguments about its causes.

2. Rhetorical Exhibits: These exhibits present a thesis and use curated materials as support. For example, photographer Sebastião Salgado's exhibits argue that the flow of global capital creates refugee crises, and his images amount to evidence for his claims.

3. Experimental Exhibits: These exhibits seek new ways of composing with archival materials, but may have rhetorical or educational aims as well. Experimental exhibits may focus on issues related to the ethics of curating, such as witnessing, working with difficult material such as racist artifacts, or on intellectual property rights and censorship.

Experimental exhibits may present different forms of curating, making use of sampling and collage, presenting multiple perspectives on the same materials (i.e. from a social scientist's perspective, a legal perspective, a philosopher's perspective, etc.), or employ avant-garde genres. We are encouraging participants to experiment with the concept of "Pulse." The puncept, invented by Gregory Ulmer, gathers together discourses based upon the similarity of their terms (the way a pun does). Thus we gather together all the meanings of the word *pulse* and note its use in various discourses (such as medical, electrical, musical, religious, and military). We note its presence in other words, such as *impulse*, *repulsive*, and *compulsion*. From these words, we form patterns and conduct additional research as the patterns suggest we do, relating this work back to our purpose and research question.

Just as writing has a variety of audiences—from the public, to a restricted group, to private use—so curating can be directed at a variety of possible audiences. We most associate curating with public museums, meant to attract as broad an audience as possible. Other groups that are restricted from curating in public spaces, such as families, curate their own exhibits in the form of family photo albums. Similarly, other groups—such as private clubs, organizations, and secret societies—curate exhibits for their members only. Finally, we can curate for ourselves much as a person can write a journal, and not only to create a record but also to address problems and to foster invention.

Our goal is to encourage ordinary people to take ownership of their historical, cultural, and intellectual legacies. It is a project of

democratization, of expanding the power of people who don't normally make history. Plenty of CEOs and other wealthy people sit on the boards of universities and museums and have disproportionate power to determine what "counts" as history, as identity, and as acceptable discourse. Many other people are left out and their history and identity get defined for them, and usually not in their interests.

The risk of democratization is that it can play to the "madding crowd"; in other words, sometimes people think they are acting a grassroots way, but in fact they are acting out their dark side and/or the will of the elites. Witness the Tea Party, a vicious animal set loose on America by the Koch Brothers, but whose followers know little or nothing about their benefactors. By encouraging citizen curating, do we risk turning the power to retell history over to the Tea Party? Possibly. Is it worth the risk? Yes. For our projects, we have a board that reviews submissions, so there is gatekeeper protection. Of course, anyone can curate a website without encountering any gatekeepers and can use that website for good or evil.

The Citizen Curator Project aims to bring about a collective being that can deliberate about its present and future based on knowledge of its past, but any such deliberation is hindered by blind spots. Unless we deal with our blind spots, our deliberations will lead us astray. Where are our blind spots? Most Americans have little or no understanding of the U.S. as an imperialist country, yet the U.S. has overthrown approximately 60 governments around the globe since World War II, mostly by force, at a terrible cost in human lives, suffering, environmental damage, and so on. People outside the United States have no problem identifying the U.S., at least its government, as being imperialistic. Similar blindness affects people in Japan and Turkey – most citizens in these countries deny their genocidal acts against other peoples. So, when U.S. citizens face a deliberation about Iran, for example, without taking into account our own history as an imperialist country, we are acting blindly.

The primary obstacle to this work (identifying and owning our own blind spots) is that most people react negatively to it. Admitting blindness, ignorance, foolishness, fault, guilt, etc. can seem like a form of weakness, or a mark of irredeemable shame. People feel their identity is at stake; we see such reactions happening over proposals to

take down the Confederate flag. But when we own our blind spots and all of our history, including the faults and guilt, we can be stronger because we are now prepared to be most effective at deliberating.

In addition to the blind spots we have within our knowledge of the world, we also have blind spots within our ethics. When we deliberately pursue purely instrumentalist aims (such as how to increase energy production) we ignore the byproducts or consequences of our actions. To deliberate ethically means to think about the consequences of our actions upon oneself, other people, other species, the environment, and for the distant future. We thus introduce to citizen curators the concept of externalities. An externality is a “cost or benefit that affects a party who did not choose to incur that cost or benefit.” (Wikipedia) Barry Commoner commented on externalities related to our technologies: “Clearly, we have compiled a record of serious failures in recent technological encounters with the environment. In each case, the new technology was brought into use before the ultimate hazards were known. We have been quick to reap the benefits and slow to comprehend the costs” (44). How do we become aware of our externalities?

To begin deliberations about a public policy issue, we pose a statement that includes a series of questions: We (we ask “who are we?”) have a problem (we ask “what is the nature of this problem?”) and we want to take actions (we ask “what actions?”) that move us closer to a state of personal and collective wellbeing. The process of understanding who we are and what the problem is—and the relationship between the two—involves reasoning by analogy. We feel the sting of recognition (the problem in me) when we see it “elsewhere.” This “elsewhere” can be real—something from history or a foreign land or from art and literature touches us from afar—which arouses empathy and enables us to identify our blind spots. Though our denial mechanisms prevent us from seeing our own blind spots using self-examination, we can see blind spots in the analogies we find elsewhere and thus we can apply the lessons from these analogies to ourselves. The analogies describe relationships: A is to B as C is to D (for example, America interventions in Iran are like Soviet interventions were in Eastern Europe).

To do this work, we must be open to identifications that raise both pleasurable and unpleasurable feelings. In other words, we must be able to experience discomfort as we make discoveries during the process. We have to be able to drop our cognitive defenses, overcome psychological resistance, and be willing to alter our identities. For example, if the pattern in our materials shows that we take pleasure in our own destruction (through environmental degradation, dehumanization, and violence), we have to be willing to consider how strongly the pattern attunes us to our underlying reality.

Must we begin with the premises that we are citizens of a racist and imperialist nation, and that we worship the figure of the vigilante, subjugate women, and destroy the environment? No. For the process to work, we must be willing to subject our thoughts and beliefs, no matter what they are, to testing. Such testing cannot be purely internal to the individual, however; introspection won't do. The same faulty operating system we use to create and maintain our beliefs is the same faulty operating system we use to check those beliefs.

Instead of relying upon internal processes of self-examination, we need a way to externalize our cognitive system so we can see it as holistically as possible and “debug” it. Curating gives us the space to debug our cognitive systems. And Gregory Ulmer's *Mystory* and its subgenres, including the Electronic Monument, give us the means to curate with this end in mind.⁸ The *Mystory* is Ulmer's approach to teaching humanities knowledge. It works in a poetic way to produce reflective disclosure, though it is not a form of self-expression. Rather, it produces self-portraits, revealing to us the points of our identification. Ulmer calls these points our premises: “the inventor's ideological premises do not determine in advance the outcome of the process but constitute the field, place, diegesis, or chora of its genesis” (2005, 84).. An Electronic Monument selects a public calamity as source material for the self-portrait. Contained in the calamity are the dimensions of our larger situation. In other words, the calamity contains wisdom that can be put to use.

⁸ To see my projects based on Ulmer's work, refer to the essays and chapters under my name in the “Works Cited” section.

In fact, the Mystorical exhibition becomes a kind of “bachelor machine” we can re-imagine as a modern oracle. We are not entirely in control of the process but should yield our initiative to the accidents of language and the serendipities that arise within discourse networks. What do we put in our exhibits? Our encounters with the three dimensions or poles of judgment (Kant): True-False, Good-Bad, and Pleasure-Pain (or Attraction-Repulsion). We ask where we are on each of the poles and where they meet. Ulmer's Popcycle guides us in the selection and arrangement of the material. Ulmer identifies four quadrants of the Popcycle—Family, Entertainment, School (national mythology), and Discipline. Each of these institutions shapes our identity as we move through it. The bachelor machine of the curated show reveals a tracing of signifiers through these institutions.

Another dimension of the citizen-curated exhibit is the juxtaposition of the personal sacred and the official sacred. To work in this dimension, we combine elements of a “problem” at the personal level—this problem can be related to money, family, career, relationships, etc. —with elements of a “problem” at the collective level—this problem can be related to war, racism, poverty, public health, crime, etc. The materials we use to think these problems are also combined—in particular, we draw materials that have affective power—that activate the axis of attraction-repulsion. This axis is the realm of the sacred (the realm beyond empirical testing and rational calculation).

The primary “audience” of a citizen curator project is the curator herself (such projects are made in the middle, or reflexive, voice). The curator reads the project the way one read the riddle-like pronouncements of the ancient Greek oracles. The curator hopes to find a pattern in the materials that pertains to both the personal and the collective problem. The curator then divines or interprets the materials to determine a prudent course of action.

A curator can be an individual person or a group of people. Regardless, the curator actually fulfills many roles. Some of these roles are inherent to all or most professional curators. Some of these functions include “selecting, filtering, naming, and collecting,”⁹ as well

⁹ See Graham and Cook

as collaborating and working among and outside of traditional institutions. These curatorial functions occur in relation to various curatorial “roles”: archivist, artist, critic, historian, documenter, promoter, educator, and many others.

The citizen curator involves a number of additional roles. First are querents; those are people who have a burning issue, question, or problem that they are ready to explore using the citizen curator method. Second are witnesses. Witnesses go into the “repulsive” parts of the culture and report back; they are investigating the abject dimensions of collective identity. These witnesses can make first-hand reports from the field; they can also report on their investigations in the archives. Third are diviners; these are people who can read the patterns in the materials gathered by the querents and witnesses. Fourth are producers; those who can make this material accessible to the public in the curated exhibit.

One of our major problems is how to curate difficult knowledge. We need to “think what we are doing”¹⁰ and to that end we need to confront the losses resulting from our actions. But people’s reluctance to accept responsibility for their actions is profound. To even raise the subject produces enormous cognitive dissonance in many people. Thus we have to deal with the psychology of resistance.

We deal with the psychology of resistance in two ways – by confronting it head-on (the intervention) and by following avant-garde methods (dependent in part upon automaticity, yielding the initiative to our materials). To deal with resistance head-on, we teach about delusion, how it forms, what factors make it more likely to occur and to harden, and what can be done to confront it. We focus on well-known, well-accepted cases to begin – cults, Nazis, etc. The lesson is that nearly everyone is delusional and associated with a cult (we define a cult as any group identity centered upon a delusional and dysfunctional belief system).

Avant-garde methods lead us to thoughts we would never reach or accept on our own. Such methods are machines that think for us and our job is just to see where they lead. Here we are using logic that was formalized by the Surrealists and then theorized, and

¹⁰ See Hannah Arendt

elaborated upon, by Jacques Derrida. The analogy for these automatic methods of thought is the game. Notable models to emulate are the Exquisite Corpse, One into Another, The Irrational Enlargement of a Film, If-Then, the Dialogue, Ilot-Mollo, The Method of Raymond Roussel, Translation, Directions for Use, Proverbs for Today, New Superstitions, Soluble Fish, Headline Poetry, etc.¹¹ We may choose some or all of these methods, and adapt them as we see fit. What these methods accomplish is a loosening of censorship (not coincidentally, they are based upon the games Freud invented to help his patients deal with their own forms of censorship that prevented them from reporting their thoughts to him). They are also fun to play and thus activate our desire to learn.

By June 2017, The Citizen Curator Project will have online citizen-curated exhibits available for viewing. Please visit: www.cah.ucf.edu/citizencurator.

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Activism In The Face Of Tragedy: Documenting The University Of Central Florida's Response To Pulse

Carys A. O'Neill

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American activist Ericka Huggins once said: "love is an expression of power that can be used to transform our world." No better sentiment sums up the reaction to the June 12, 2016 massacre at Orlando's Pulse nightclub, the single event that would shake the 21st century LGBT community to its core and confront the American people with yet another reminder of the animosity, intolerance, and fanaticism running so rampant in our society.

But something else, something much larger, grew out of this senseless act of violence. In the days following the attack, the Orlando community witnessed an outpouring of support from around the world. Untold numbers of flowers, posters, cards, and other such ephemera were laid around the club, covering sidewalks and creating an eerily tangible sea of grief. Pulse quickly became a rallying point for millions regardless of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, an example of the power of unity in the face of adversity.

Such was also the case at the University of Central Florida (UCF), where the Special Collections Department crafted a Pulse archive, a small yet poignant assortment of ephemera collected after a series of vigils held on campus in the days immediately following the

tragedy. It was here that I saw the potential for a project. As a member of the LGBT community and a student in Orlando at the time, I remember finding myself instantly immersed in the additional realm of memory and loss that was digital media.

The tragedy increased awareness of the underlying sociocultural issues at play as evidenced by the community's immediate physical response; yet, the digital reactions, arguably just as poignant as its physical counterparts, went largely unrecorded in local archives. Even within the confines of my own campus, social media and online news sources brought the tragedy to an entirely new light almost instantly.

In conjunction with the Special Collections, I began an informal archive of electronic sources like social media posts, campus-wide announcements, and local news stories. I sought not only to document a very intangible response to tragedy within the UCF community, but also to make known the capacity of both digital content and digital methodology in the conveyance of meaning. In the aftermath of the shooting, digital media quickly became not only an outlet for healing, but also a rallying point for grassroots activism. By intentionally collecting and protecting primary sources of information that could be used to tell the stories of marginalized groups, and to rally against histories of injustice, my own archival work contributed to the potential for engagement and greater change. This archival work was far more than a simple preservation initiative; in my own way, I was lending support to citywide causes by means of channeling these digital tools.

My own project quickly became one focused on both the preservation of these efforts and the commendation of their impact. This primary source material is still being published, meaning the search is ongoing and will continue as long as the UCF community responds to the tragedy. The goal has now become how to capitalize on the resources of local archives and the larger humanities community, in order to foster increased public engagement as raw emotion gives way to reflection. In conjunction with the Special Collections, the RICHES (Regional Initiative for Collecting History, Experiences and Stories) program, the UCF Library, and a commendable Institute of Museum and Library Services grant project called Citizen Curator, I am

currently experimenting with ways to bring these digital archives back into the public sphere and foster interaction to help promote healing and the sharing of memories. What makes this project so special is that there is an incredible amount of potential for the involvement of the UCF community in the response and subsequent memorializing of a tragedy that hit so close to home for so many through the medium of digital scholarship and humanities-based activism. This event is still so fresh in the minds of our community, but as painful as that proves to be, it also stands as an opportunity for learning, growth, and solidarity through the confrontation of the ills that brought us to this point. Engagement, awareness, and unbridled intention can help bring about the change we so desire for our society. It is up to us to decide where we go from here, and I want to have a hand in shaping that future.

Curator As Activist

Yulia Tikhonova

Yulia Tikhonova is the Director of St. John's University Art Gallery. From 2014-2016, she directed the Art Gallery at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

At the time of the tragedy at the Pulse Nightclub, in 2016, in Orlando, Florida, I was the Director of the Art Gallery at the School of Visual Arts and Design (SVAD) at the University of Central Florida in Orlando (UCF). In the early morning hours of June 12th, a gunman opened fire at Pulse, killing 49 and wounding 53 others. It was an unspeakable act of violence against the LGBTQ community. I learned of the tragedy as I was driving to work. UCF is just 15 miles from the nightclub. The news about the tragedy was spreading at the same time, and the radio was broadcasting responses from around the world.

Orlando in that moment became an international symbol of the homophobia, xenophobia, and racism that is poisoning so many nations today. I was shocked and struggled to understand what had happened. I could not breathe.

I felt a personal and professional responsibility to respond. As the Director of the Art Gallery, I was a public figure in Orlando, and had friends and acquaintances within many communities. I knew there was a large gay community, but I was not aware of its diversity. I had been thinking about an invitation to this community, through an exhibition or event sometime in the future. The Pulse tragedy unexpectedly thrust itself upon Orlando and I needed to get directly involved, and to do so fast. I had to become an activist-curator.

My first thought that morning was to immediately open the Gallery to our community as a space for grieving. I sent a priority email to leadership of the School of Visual Arts and Design. I proposed to offer a memorial space that could accommodate the many physical offerings that individuals wanted to give and share in honor and tribute to the victims. I knew that these offerings would become part of a treasured archive documenting the history of this event. They would become a teaching resource of tolerance and inclusion. In a few minutes, I heard from the Director of the School of Visual Arts and

Design. His abrupt note was: "Don't do anything. Wait for the higher echelon to initiate this." His reply appalled me!

UCF is an important voice in the community. It is a premier research institution, and the second largest public University in the United States, with an active LGBTQ students' association. Our timely response to such serious events was vital to our students. For me, there was no doubt that immediate engagement by the UCF Gallery was required.

Instead, to my shame, it was the UCF Student Union—with its autonomy as a student-governed space—that offered its premises for a Pulse memorial. Students, faculty, and nearby community members were invited to bring objects and create an assemblage of material culture that would help them cope with or reflect on the tragedy. In addition, the UCF counseling center maintained a memorial drawing for several months where everyone could share and express their feelings in the aftermath of the tragedy; and the UCF Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories of Central Florida (RICHES) responded to the tragedy by conducting a number of oral history recordings, which gave birth to the GLBT History Museum of Central Florida. The Museum is continuing the difficult job of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting the community's history, in order to provide a documentary record for research, and to display, with pride, the LGBTQ community's contributions to Orlando.

The shocking aspect that I did not understand immediately was that the majority of the victims at Pulse were Latinx. The temporary collections of objects—shrines or make-shift monuments—displayed the Puerto Rican flag, or a candle to a patron saint lit near a loved one's photograph, or messages of love and solidarity chalked on the sidewalk, written in Spanish.

My unfulfilled Pulse initiative was a continuation of the community curating on which I pride myself. While in Orlando, I opened the Gallery to community members: the Orlando Peace Film Festival, the Eatonville Preservation Coalition, and the Orlando Science Center. As I watched from the sidelines as the work of mourning was carried forward by a host of organizations and spontaneous groups, my own dedication to the role of public curator deepened.

But there was unexpected news: in August, a team that I helped to assemble received a two-year grant for The Citizen Curator Project from the Institute of Library and Museum Services. In light of the enormous obligation to properly document and archive both the profound trauma and the extraordinary outpouring of community resilience and reaffirmation, we decided that the first year of the grant would be devoted to digitization and exhibition of the Pulse archives focusing on the themes of resilience after the shooting and tragedy, and eliminationism, which would be defined as discourses, actions, and social policies that seek to suppress, exile, or exterminate perceived opponents.

As a consequence of this decision, I can now look forward to the first anniversary of the tragedy knowing that the UCF Art Gallery will join its efforts with other public institutions in Orlando to plan exhibitions dedicated to the Pulse massacre, which will support of our LGBTQ community. I won't be there in person. I have a new job at St. John's University in New York City, where I am, once again, Gallery Director. I learned some hard lessons at UCF and I am confident that I will be better prepared to fulfill the responsibilities I feel are incumbent on any gallery director at an educational institution. I am inspired by the distinguished tributes and memorials that followed terrorist attacks in Boston, New York, Paris, and Oklahoma City. They are not only memorials to loss; they are also essential sites of healing and redemption. I will be a curator who is simultaneously an activist.

**PART FIVE:
PERFORMANCE AS ACTIVISM**

**On The Humanities In The Internet Era:
Radical Performance Art, Cyber-Migrancy, And
Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *La Pocha Nostra***

Nevena Stojanovic

Nevena Stojanovic is a Lecturer at West Virginia University, where she teaches courses in composition and American literature. Her research centers on presentations of women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American and transatlantic literatures, nomadism and displacement, rearticulations of selfhood in contact zones, and radical performance art. She is working on a book that examines performances of Jewishness in non-Jewish American novels at the turn of the twentieth century.

Since their inception, the humanities have been sites for bringing individuals and communities together, for bridging gaps in communication and between distant geographic locations, and for expanding our understanding of the darkness within us and the darkness in the world. One of the domains of the humanities that crosses boundaries between disciplines, enriches our understanding of the permeability and translucency of the internal and external, and offers us new avenues of social activism is radical performance art. With an emphasis on the exposure of deeply internalized mechanisms of othering, Guillermo Gómez-Peña's international performance art events testify to the potential of the humanities to act against oppressive social forces and include diverse voices in the creation of new realities. His performance art group called *La Pocha Nostra* has staged live radical performances in different locations in the United States and beyond its borders, motivating audiences to eradicate ethnic stereotyping and inviting educators to introduce the group's work to their students and colleagues. The group's website, also named *La Pocha Nostra* (www.pochanostra.com), plays an important role in making these performances accessible to the new, postmodern type of tourists—cyber-migrants—from all over the world. As James Clifford reminds us, home and travel are constantly linked together (44-45). Travelers take something meaningful from visited locations, and reminiscences of these places help them incorporate the places

themselves in their lives (Clifford 44). Furthermore, as Susan Roberson notes, if one travels voluntarily, such trips often result in “more positive self-transformations” (xvii). In this essay, I will argue that both onsite and online audiences at La Pocha Nostra’s performances have helped this group of performance artists reshape the existent artistic space and cyberspace, subverting the Euro-American cultural hegemony and motivating educators to incorporate La Pocha Nostra’s work in their academic syllabi in the humanities.

The relatively easy access to the Internet in the postmodern world created a new category of tourists: cyber-migrants. These are subjects who travel without visas and flight tickets and see without being seen. Their ability to anonymously infiltrate the Internet from anywhere in the world motivated Gómez-Peña to create a multiethnic artistic cyberspace at the end of the twentieth century. Gómez-Peña’s decision to shape this virtual space was an attempt to “remap” the existent artistic cyberspace of the 1990s, produced by American artists who had been working with digital technologies, and who believed that their high-tech art world was “a politically neutral, raceless, genderless, classless and allegedly egalitarian ‘territory’ that would provide everyone with unlimited opportunities for participation, interaction and belonging” (“The Virtual Barrio”). This cyberspace offered its visitors the fake feeling of belonging in the time of social disconnection and loneliness, providing them with a superficial escape from everyday reality, permeated by severe social (racial and gender) conflicts affecting the U.S. at the time.¹² In such a social climate, the existent artistic cyberspace enabled its visitors to assume roles and poses of different ethnicities, genders, and classes without any risks and consequences, and the creators of the network considered such activities “liberating, rather than superficial or escapist” (“The Virtual Barrio”). As Gómez-Peña notes, that virtual art world was hegemonic

¹²As Gómez-Peña reminds us, the mid-1990s in the US were marked by “repression and denial regarding matters of race and gender” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). Conservative, nationalist policies boosted general “anti-immigration sentiments promoted by ‘ultra-nativist’ politicians, like Pat Buchanan, Jesse Helms, and . . . Pete Wilson,” which “may have been taken by many as a tacit endorsement of prejudice and Mexiphobia” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). The LGBT population serving in the military was affected by the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, which took effect in 1994 and lasted until 2011.

since its official language was English, it used “depoliticized” and highly specialized “theoretical vocabulary,” its “master narrative” operated in “the utopian, dated language of Western democratic values or as a bizarre form of New Age anti-corporate/corporate jargon,” and its lack of diversity was attributed to ethnic minorities’ “lack of interest, not money or access” (“The Virtual Barrio”). This artistic cyberspace postulated itself as a space of the dominant social order, only affirming the hegemony that it supposedly wanted to deconstruct.

Gómez-Peña and his performance group created a new virtual frontier to challenge the network that claimed open access to everyone but truly neglected many artists of Chicano, Native American, African American, Asian American, and other origins, as well as artists from developing countries. *La Pocha Nostra*'s primary goal was to include performances and voices of people of different cultural backgrounds.

This new digital world border operates in combinations of different languages, destabilizing the language of Euro-American cultural hegemony. Gómez-Peña's cyberspace displays video clips and photos that show stereotyped presentations of Latinos, Native Americans, Iranians, etc. Unlike the previous network that invited its visitors to superficially assume poses of Others,¹³ Gómez-Peña's group invites their audience, visitors of the digital world border from all over the world, to participate in creations of “authentic” models of their cultural Others, face their anxieties about Otherness, learn to respect multiculturalism, and contribute to social changes. Initially, the group made separate web pages for different installation projects. In 1997, they created *La Pocha Nostra* (www.pochanostra.com), the website that has displayed their entire work.

The existent artistic network, though envisioned as a place for an escape from reality, was just an extended platform for strategic operations of reality: it encouraged superficial assumptions of different identities and endorsed English as its official language. Such a network only reaffirmed the power of the dominant social order, marginalizing artists who could have tremendously contributed to its foundation as

¹³ Gómez-Peña's work addresses the postcolonial Other. As Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, the process of othering combines “empirical reality” with “a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections” (8).

well as cyber-migrants who could not or did not want to communicate in English. By postulating itself as a space of strategic operations, this network provoked the resistance of the marginalized Others.

Gómez-Peña's team and their international cyber-audience infiltrated the web initially through the web pages for different installation projects and then through *La Pocha Nostra*. Their intervention exemplifies de Certeau's concept of a tactic. The creation of the group's website was a tactical move towards resistance. Using the same technology as the artists in the existent network, Gómez-Peña and his collaborators created a cyberspace of the marginalized. The participation of cyber-migrants in Gómez-Peña's projects was a tactical gesture towards an organized action.

The first project that reflected this vision was "The Ethno-Cyberpunk Trading Post & Curio Shop on the Electronic Frontier." It was enacted in the Diverse Works Gallery in Dallas, Texas, in 1994, the year when Gomez-Pena and Sifuentes decided that "in situ digital technologies" should be integral parts of their performances ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The famous Native American performer James Luna and several "local artists" participated in this "human exhibition area" where [the artists] displayed [them]selves as 'exotic specimens' and 'performance artists at work'" ("Ethno-cyborgs"). Besides these human specimens, the venue was equipped with "taxidermied [*sic*] animals" and "curiosity cabinets containing ironized post-modern or pseudo-primitive 'archeological artifacts,'" which were supposed to remind the viewers of "the hybrid nature of contemporary culture and our dying 'Western civilization'" ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The contemporary digital equipment and lights were important props in the venue, reminding the viewers of postmodern technological trends.

La Pocha Nostra used the Internet to transmit the staged characters' poses to distant viewers as well as ask them to send suggestions for stereotypical performances of Latin Americans and "indigenous people" ("Ethno-cyborgs"). Sifuentes played the role of Cyber Vato, "a 'robo-gang member' consumed by techno-gadgetry, including a computer keyboard which he used to communicate with internet users during live performances" ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The roles that Gomez-Pena and Luna played were those of "'the Shame-man,' 'el Postmodern Zorro,' 'El Cultural Transvestite,' and 'El Natural Born

Asesino” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). The online contributors sent various suggestions, and the staged poses were shown on “the gallery monitors” and disseminated via the Internet (“Ethno-cyborgs”). The spectators in the venue made their own recommendations as well, and some distant viewers sent their suggestions “by fax or by phone” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). The online contributors’ interaction with Gómez-Peña, Sifuentes, and Luna was very effective because of the relatively easy access to the Internet and anonymity provided by it. The artificially created safe zone of La Pocha Nostra’s web page for this project was a space that could be reached without paying for a ticket to Houston and where cyber-migrants could freely bring new “authenticity” to staging Otherness. Thus, cyber-migrants tactically infiltrated cyberspace from different locations.

Motivated by the tremendous success with this onsite and online show, Gomez-Pena and his group agreed on permanently maintaining their website. As Gómez-Peña explains, “In the first year, we received over 20,000 ‘hits’ (visitors to the site) according to the counter, and a large percentage of them answered our pseudo-anthropological questionnaire” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). Furthermore, he points out that the visitors’ contributions “were of a uniquely confessional nature, decidedly more graphic and explicit than those gathered during live performances of the Temple of Confessions (the other major project we were working on at the time)” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). Based on the pool of the contributions collected through this “questionnaire,” the group launched a new project on the imagined representations of “the new mythical Mexican and Chicano of the ‘90’s” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). As Gómez-Peña explains, “The most recurrent and emblematic responses from live audiences and internet users became the inspiration for a series of performance personae or ‘ethno-cyborgs’ co-created (or rather ‘co-imagined’) in dialogue with gallery visitors and anonymous net users” (“Ethno-cyborgs”). The group’s website immediately became the springboard for their new projects.

One of these early installation performances that arose from the Temple of Confessions was *El Mexterminator I*. It was first enacted in Mexico City in 1995, but different versions of *El Mexterminator I* have been presented “in Canada, Puerto Rico, Spain, Austria, Italy, and

the UK, as well as throughout the US" ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The project was envisioned as a display of stereotyped images of Latin Americans, constructed out of cyber-migrants' confessions of their cultural sins in *La Pocha Nostra's* virtual temple of confessions ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The anonymous confessions revealed that Latin American immigrants were perceived as a menace to the US economy and stability and that the US/Mexican border should be opened only for drug trade ("Ethno-cyborgs"). When asked what fantasies they would project onto the bodies of "a gang member covered with tattoos," "a Native American in full regalia," and "a romantic over-sexualized Mexican macho dressed as a post-modern Zorro," some of the cyber-migrants confessed that they would shoot them, have intercourse with them, or make them have an orgy ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The confessions showed that the Hollywood and MTV images of "the 'sleepy Mexican,'" "the exotic border 'señorita,'" "Frito Bandito, Speedy Gonzalez, Juan Valdez, Frida Kahlo, and "the 'greaser' bandit" did not exist in the imagination of cyber-migrants at the end of the past century ("Ethno-cyborgs"). Instead, "mighty robo-Mexicans," figures "with mysterious shamanic artifacts and sci-fi automatic weapons," with "prosthetic implants" and with "Aztec tattoos" were the new imagined Mexican Others ("Ethno-cyborgs"). The new stereotypes were imbued with "a perverse dialectic of intercultural violence and interracial desire," proving that Latin Americans were perceived as simultaneously aggressive and sex-appealing as well as tech-savvy and primitive ("Ethno-cyborgs"). Just as in the previous live performance, in *El Mexterminator I* the spectators at the venue and cyber-migrants were invited to contribute to the project, and images from the performance were accessible through the group's website for a while. *La Pocha Nostra* was gradually growing into a collection of the group's practical and theoretical work, inviting those interested in radical performance art to explore it, learn from it, and use it.

In literal translation from Spanish, *La Pocha Nostra* means "our haricot bean," but Gómez-Peña has come up with a special meaning of the phrase in Spanglish. The literal meaning suggests that the website offers important "food for thought," but simultaneously, it is reminiscent of the racial slur "beaner," used for Mexicans, because of the prevalence of beans in their cuisine. Thus, the reference to haricot

beans and the allusion to the racial slur “beaner” invoke racial othering, announcing the group’s experimentation with racial stereotypes.

However, in his *Ethno-Techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy*, Gómez-Peña defines the meaning of *La Pocha Nostra* for the purposes of his team’s cultural mission. He specifies that in Spanglish this “neologism” means “our impurities” or “the cartel of cultural bastards” and points out that his performance art group is “a virtual *maquiladora* (assembly plant) that produces brand-new metaphors, symbols, images, and words to explain the complexities of our times” (78, his italics). While in the English translation *La Pocha Nostra* means “our haricot bean,” in the language of the website it relates to the intent of its founding group—the exposure of our cultural sins regarding the marginalized communities. This discrepancy reflects the difference between the real world and cyberspace. While in English the phrase denotes the prevalent ingredient in the Mexican cuisine and alludes to the infamous racial slur for Mexicans, in the invented language it refers to the artists and cyber-migrants’ work towards the eradication of racial stereotyping. The meanings thus establish a fine line between the real world and cyberspace, pointing at their interdependence and coexistence: life in the real world, permeated by the fear of Others, stimulates the creation of cyberspace as a destination that provides cyber-migrants with opportunities to self-reflect, learn about their cultural sins, look back at society, and work towards its improvement.

Envisioned as a website that would display and announce the group’s work, invite cyber-migrants to contribute to the group’s projects, and mediate interactions between the group and cyber-migrants, *La Pocha Nostra* has undergone many technical changes since its creation. However, all the versions of *La Pocha Nostra* have vividly portrayed underlying messages of the group’s cultural mission. The current website exposes the picture of a skeleton, framed by two concentric circles, vividly alluding to the transformation of human body under an othering/stereotyping gaze. Different parts of the skeleton lead to different links: the head to “home/pagina principal,” the mouth to “radio free pocha/generously housed by the hemispheric institute,” the heart to “4 photo portfolios/ in progress,” the left hand to “retrospective/hemisphere institute,” the genitalia to “our favorite/10

videos,” and the spine to “Gómez-Peña’s photo album.” The title of the website starts above the skeleton, displaying “Gómez-Peña’s La Pocha Nostra/live art lab” with the links to “manifiesto 2012” in the upper right corner, and it ends beneath the skeleton, with the links to “la pocha nostra blog,” “pocha touring calendar,” and “pocha booking materials” in the lower right corner.

If one clicks on “home/pagina principal,” the web page shows an image of a dead chicken with a noose, hanging from a spot between the two concentric circles. The chicken moves to the left and the right, suggesting the intent behind La Pocha Nostra’s projects: an observation of the world from the position of the oppressed. Below the concentric circles there are seven tribal dance masks, each of them leading to a link: “about [La Pocha Nostra],” “projects,” “news,” “galeria,” “readings,” “projects and materials,” and “store.” The links branch into a variety of photos, messages from La Pocha Nostra, essays written by Gómez-Peña, etc., providing a spectrum of information about the group’s past and ongoing projects. A visitor to the website has an enticing visual and acoustic experience of the group’s work because she can access video clips and photos from many performances by using the navigation tools.

There is no doubt that capitalism enabled the creation of the website and cyber-migrancy, but La Pocha Nostra and its fans use these opportunities to achieve their own goals. The visitors of *La Pocha Nostra* confirm Kaplan’s claim that tourism arises from “consumer culture, leisure, and technical innovation” (27), but they use the privilege of a consumer position to destabilize the power of the dominant social order. Gómez-Peña’s cyber-migrants infiltrate cyberspace to make its borders more flexible and its territory more permeable. As de Certeau explains, “Consumers are transformed into immigrants. The system in which they move about is too vast to be able to fix them in one place, but too constraining for them ever to be able to escape from it and go into exile elsewhere. There is no longer an elsewhere” (40). Since there is no haven beyond the system, Gómez-Peña’s cyber-migrants create one within it. They keep rewriting the performance arts cartography by using the same tools of operation as the dominant social order, but to different ends.

In La Pocha Nostra's projects, the magnitude of the performers and cyber-migrants' intervention can be adequately assessed only if one approaches it as an over-time phenomenon. As de Certeau points out, "strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (38-39, his italics). The tactical intervention started as a project in the spaces of galleries and museums, where the performers staged stereotyped images of Latinos, parodying the colonial powers' vogue of exposing the handicrafts from colonies and the colonized themselves. It expanded by including the voices of the spectators in the gallery and online contributors and by receiving a spot in cyberspace. By becoming "landmarks" in *La Pocha Nostra*, Gómez-Peña's projects attracted many cyber-migrants, who viewed video clips even after the installation performance was over. From the performances in Houston and elsewhere to the ongoing projects accessible through the group's website, cyber-migrants have planted their own voices in La Pocha Nostra's cultural project. The marginalized have delineated their own space of action against marginalization.

While all the migrants do resist marginalization through their participation in La Pocha Nostra's projects, they accomplish this in different ways, keeping *La Pocha Nostra* in a state of constant change. The complexity of cyber-migrants' infiltration of the web can be explained through de Certeau's concept of "walking in the city" (91-110). Any spatial order offers various possibilities to the walker, and she naturally uses some of these, moves the others around, and creates new ones. In de Certeau's words, "the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements" (98). Once the migrants enter *La Pocha Nostra*, each of them makes a choice of what they want to see, read, download, print, and inform others about. While the temple of confessions was on the website, cyber-migrants admitted various cultural sins. Some of them acknowledged having a sexual desire for an Other, whereas the others confessed their malevolent intent towards an Other. Cyber-migrants' participation in the project resulted in the growth of the project itself and the enrichment of the website.

If cyber-migrants' travels through the new virtual art world can be considered examples of de Certeau's "walking in the city," then *La Pocha Nostra* is the "city" they keep visiting. According to de Certeau, "To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place" (103). By visiting various "landmarks" on *La Pocha Nostra* and participating in their projects, cyber-migrants try to find and recreate spaces for resistance. *La Pocha Nostra* is thus the cyberspace of the marginalized, the space filled with dreams and hope. As de Certeau further explains, "Travel (like walking) is a substitute for the legends that used to open up space to something different... What this walking exile produces is precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one's own vicinity... As a corollary, one can measure the importance of these signifying practices (to tell oneself legends) as practices that invent spaces" (106-107). By traveling through *La Pocha Nostra* and participating in its various projects, migrants tell their own legends of oppression and resistance. Constant changes in *La Pocha Nostra*'s membership, projects, and audience make the website itself subject to revision. As Gómez-Peña observes in *Ethno-Techno*: "La Pocha Nostra is committed to a permanent process of reinvention. This means La Pocha Nostra's membership and projects may have changed when this 'open text' is finally published. Unfortunately permanent reinvention and ever shifting multidimensionality hinder sustainability" (80-81). Changes in the structure of the group influence changes in the image of the website. For instance, *The Temple of Confessions* and *El Mexterminator I* are not accessible through *La Pocha Nostra* any more, and the website now exhibits several recent projects. *La Pocha Nostra* is in a constant state of permeability and flux.

Though the group changes, its commitment to pedagogy remains constant. As Gómez-Peña points out, "Once the performance is over and people walk away, our hope is that a process of reflection gets triggered in their perplexed psyches... The objective is not to 'like' or even 'understand' performance art; but to create a sediment in the audience's psyche" ("In defense of performance Art"). Those who attend *La Pocha Nostra*'s performances rarely remain indifferent. In his

essay posted on *Dialogic*, Michael Benton, who was an instructor at Bowling Green State University when he saw *El Mexterminator I* with his class, confesses that, after watching the stereotyped images of ethnic Others projected onto the screen in the performance site's lobby, he realized that he "had consumed these images without any recognition of the pain that they might cause." Before entering the performance site, he was apprehensive about what he would encounter at the venue, admitting that he was in what anthropologist Victor Turner calls a "liminal state" (qtd. in Benton). As Turner explains, "During the liminal period, neophytes are alternatively encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection" (qtd. in Benton). After viewing the stereotyped images and realizing the injustice their circulation must have caused, Benton entered the performance site, where he encountered the exposed specimens. He and his friend "offered [El Mexterminator] alcohol and cigarettes instead of the fruits nearby," later wondering whether this action reflected his earlier trips to Mexico while he was eager "to seek forbidden or exotic adventures?" (Benton). After the performance, some of his students spoke enthusiastically about the show, but most of them did not know how to interpret what they encountered (Benton). They analyzed the performance several times, trying to understand their own behavior in the performance venue and the complexity of the project (Benton). In *Dangerous Border Crossers*, Gómez-Peña explains that his performances are designed to evoke the ritualized elements of the brujos and shamans that he visits as a client or spectator: "Their job, like ours, is to create, with the use of chant poetry, surprising gestures and ritualized actions, highly charged props and elaborate costumes, a coherent symbolic system that helps patients (or in our case audience members) understand themselves, their existential malaise and their socio-cultural circumstances a little better" (233). Benton acknowledges that after seeing *El Mexterminator I* and reading *The Temple of Confessions*, his attitude to his "home state of California" has changed.

La Pocha Nostra makes the incorporation of the group's projects in one's syllabi easy. In my class on rhetoric and composition, when I talk about mechanisms of stereotyping in everyday life, I ask

my students to do La Pocha Nostra's quiz from *The Chica-Iranian project: Orientalism Gone Bad in Aztlan*, available on the group's website. In the section on *The Chica-Iranian Project*, there is a quiz on cyber-migrants' "ethnic profiling skills" in the post-9/11 era. Whoever wants to take the quiz is supposed to match a photo with the name of the performance artist. Ethnic and national backgrounds of the artists are listed next to their names. There are twelve photos presenting stereotypes of Afghans, Palestinians, Iranians, Kurds, Mexicans, Chicanos/as, Native Americans, rebels, and terrorists, and eight performers of Chicano/a, "post-Mexican," "half-Japanese," and Iranian background. (The current quiz includes the images of the "Typical Arab Chola," "El Spaghetti Greaser Bandit," a "Palestinian Vato Loco," "La Kurdish Llorona," "La Bruja Nahautl," an "Afghan Immigrant in Texas," and the "Generic Terrorist"). In the past, as soon as one had finished the quiz, the following message appeared on the screen: "Bravissimo. Thanks for participating in our (non)objective risk classification exercise. You've added greatly to our store of targeted intelligence. We feel much safer now." This message no longer appears after one takes the test, which again testifies to *La Pocha Nostra's* constant growth and changes in appearance. Upon taking the test, my class and I discuss the results and analyze what made us match certain photographs with the names and origins of the artists. We talk about unconscious connections between certain ethnic names and dangerous objects shown in the pictures as well as the role of the media in establishing such connections. Together, through an open dialogue, we try to reach the phase of what Paulo Freire calls "*conscientização*," or learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (35). I always divide students in groups and assign them to invent their own creative methods of revealing oppressive elements of reality to masses (this task is either their homework or in-class assignment). They are allowed to compose provocative pamphlets, draw comics, make posters, stage their own brief performances, etc. After they present their work, we discuss the effectiveness of the presentations, trying to compile a database of productive methods.

Gómez-Peña still invites cyber-migrants to participate in various projects. By including voices from all over the world and

resisting the English language as the official mode of communication, *La Pocha Nostra* is undeniably more effective in resisting ethnocentrism than the previous artistic network. However, the issues of hegemonic communication have not been completely solved. Though Gómez-Peña's projects operate through the pidgin language, a hybridized combination of English, French, Spanish, Italian, and some robo-languages invented by Gómez-Peña, all the aforesaid popular languages are the ones used by former colonial and current global powers, and there are still people who cannot communicate in them. Bearing in mind *La Pocha Nostra*'s mission to teach multiculturalism, the virtual frontier should aim at including all the languages in the world and consulting translators for the easier understanding of the posted messages, since slipping into the usage of Esperanto or any other artificially created unifying language would contradict Gómez-Peña's goal to encourage diversity.

La Pocha Nostra's projects could never succeed if it were not for the willingness of cyber-migrants to engage in the conversations and performances initiated by Gómez-Peña and his colleagues. The diversity in performance techniques, genders, races, and nationalities broadens cyberspace and provides room for self-reflection and growth in multicultural communities. Though *La Pocha Nostra*'s projects can unjustly be labeled "preaching to the converted," since their audience includes mostly performance artists, performance scholars, their students, and other individuals interested in Gómez-Peña's mission, the process of conversion is complex, and it entails one's constant introspection and motivates the un-converted to join the continuously-converting community. As Tim Miller and David Román point out, "there is no definitive moment of absolute conversion" (178). If one wants to develop, she has "to be open to a series of conversions," since conversion is "a way of being that implies a constant state of negotiation and need depending on the specific psychosocial and sociohistorical occasions of our daily lives" and "demands a continual testing of one's identity, if only as a means to affirm it" (178). The willingness of all of us who admire *La Pocha Nostra*'s projects to self-reflect, recognize our own cultural sins, and change our own negative behavioral patterns, is what makes *La Pocha Nostra*'s mission meaningful. Cyber-migrants are the ones who keep *La Pocha Nostra*'s

accomplishments developing and amalgamating, and once computers and the Internet become more accessible to people from areas affected by poverty, wars, and natural disasters, the virtual frontier's community will be even more influential than it is today.

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**PART SIX:
VISUALIZING ACTIVISM**

Capturing A Black Aesthetic: Photographing Activism

Malika Zwanya Crutchfield

Malika Zwanya Crutchfield, M.A., is a Bay Area based educator, writer, and community advocate. As a certified CAADAC therapist, she works with addiction, trauma, and mindfulness in her in mental health practice. As a PhD student in the African Diaspora Studies department at UC Berkeley, Malika looks at intersections between race, gender, mental health, racialized space, and freedom, and how black bodies live these modes of experience in different spaces throughout the Diaspora. Her undergraduate degree is from Sarah Lawrence College. Malika is a digital photographer who has had work shown throughout the US and internationally.

To view Malika Zwanya Crutchfield's digital photo gallery, visit: <https://bodhizwanya.com>; or, the digital version of this issue of the journal: <https://stjenglish.com/st-johns-humanities-review>.

END NOTE

Education As Political Act! Educator As Political Activist!: An Interactive Experimental Narrative And Manifesto¹⁴

Michael Carosone

Michael Carosone is a writer, educator, and activist. With his partner/husband, Joseph LoGiudice, he wrote and edited the book *Our Naked Lives: Essays from Gay Italian-American Men*, which is a

¹⁴ Originally published in *Lunch Review*, September 2016, edited by D. Gilson, published by Punctum Books, <http://www.lunchreview.org/education-as-political-act--educator-as->

collection of 15 personal essays on the lives of Gay Italian-American men (his essay appears in the book). His poems, essays, and articles have been published in a variety of books, journals, and newspapers. He writes on personal, political, and social issues, including marginalized peoples and literatures, especially the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Community. At various conferences nationwide, he has presented papers on LGBTQ Italian-Americans. He is a doctoral research fellow in the Ph.D. program in English at St. John's University. His current research focuses on the transformative, empowering, and political acts of reading, writing, and teaching LGBTQ literature. He is a native New Yorker from Brooklyn and lives in Manhattan with his husband and dog, Rocco.

“Literature offers a language powerful enough to say how it is. It isn't a hiding place. It's a finding place.” —Jeanette Winterson

In my dream—
the same recurring dream
for months now—
I am with:
Theodore Adorno,
Antonio Gramsci,
Karl Marx,
Edward Said, and
Howard Zinn—
all men, I know,
but I can't censor a dream for feminism;
women will appear soon—
and Noam Chomsky appears, too,
but the other five won't let him stay;
they say that he still has too much work to do on Earth,
so I have to talk to him alone back on the planet.
The six of us are not in heaven;
we don't believe in that crap;
we are either in my apartment,
or in a classroom,
or in a park or a forest,

or in a protest line,
sometimes at a café,
and we are always talking about the political acts
of education, of reading, of writing,
of speaking, of listening, of breathing,
of living every second of every day.
I am teaching them creative writing—
absurd, I know—
and I tell them to:

Write a postmodern poem in which you advocate for one or all of the following:

1. Education as political act;
2. Educator as political activist;
3. Intellectual as speaker of truth to power;
4. Auschwitz never to happen again;
5. Literature to effect positive change, literature as social justice.

Dear Reader,

Now, I want you to use those prompts, above, to write your own poems! Go!

We have questions for postmodern educators:

1. How can education be a political act in a positive way?
2. How can an educator (intellectual) be an activist who effects positive change?
3. How can we be educator-activists when teaching literature?
4. How can we use literature to make sure that the Holocaust never happens again?
5. How can we use literature, literacy, reading, and writing as social justice?

Now, I want you to answer those questions! Go!



“Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet.” –Alice Walker

“I write to imagine things differently—and in imagining things differently perhaps the world will change.” –Terry Tempest Williams

“All good art is political.” –Toni Morrison