



MAR.
2022

NO.
18

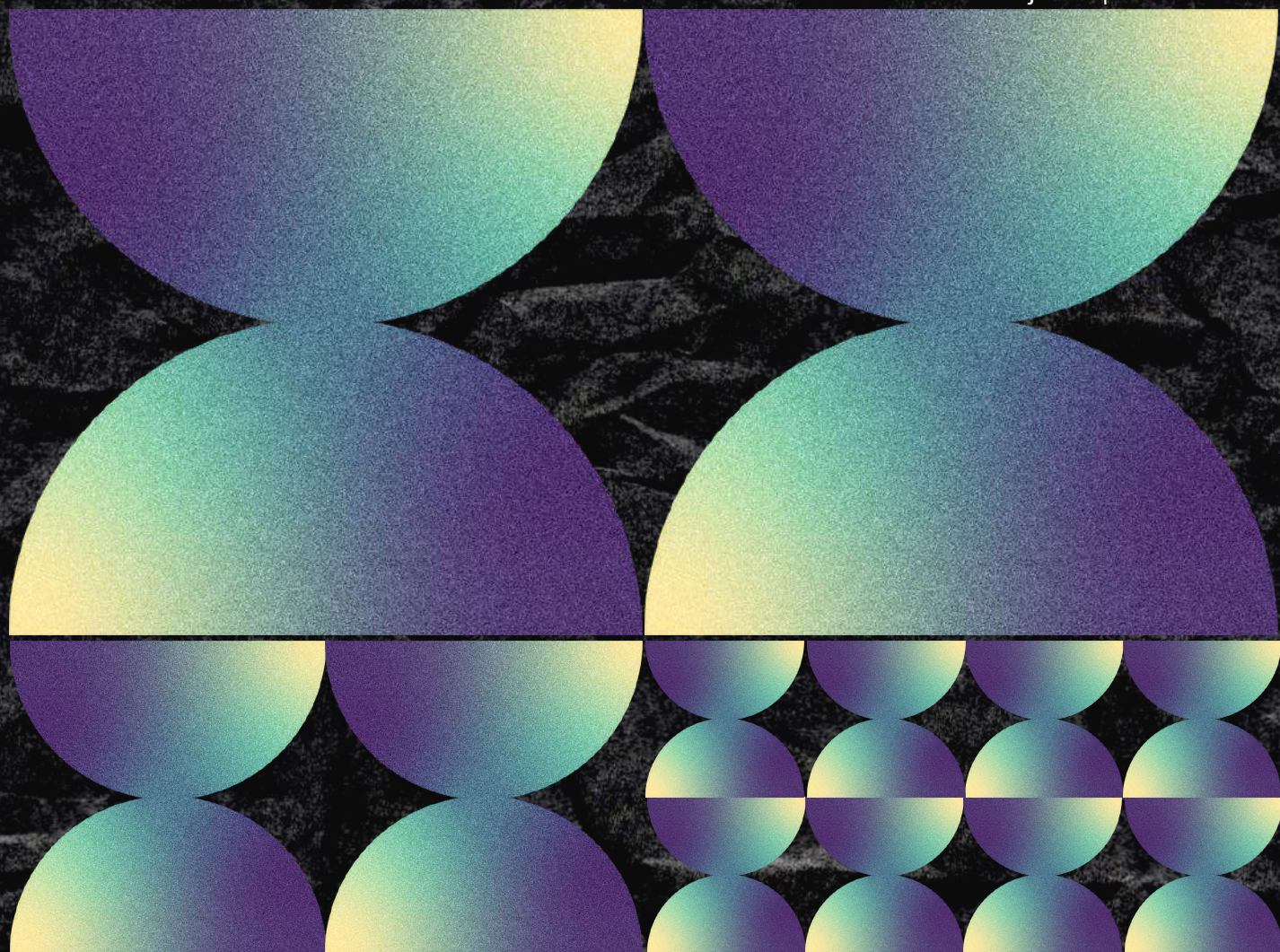
PROJECT PROJECT PROJECT

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF
FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
NATIONAL TAIWAN UNIVERSITY



ISSUER
DR. HSIN-YING LI
ADVISOR
DR. ALEXANDER PAULSSON LASH, DR. CHANG-MIN YU
EDITORS
JENNY CHAI, SAVANNA LAI, LITING WENG
VISUAL DESIGN
SAVANNA LAI





T A B L E OF CONTENTS

02	Editor's Note	24	Gaia Liting Weng	35	The Nanny Savanna Lai
03	MHP Interview Savanna Lai	28	3M3T Jenny Chai	42	Upcoming Events
11	EALA Jenny Chai	31	Yet Another Letter of Apology Ting-Mao C.		
14	Situations Liting Weng	32	Migrants Savanna Lai		
17	New Beginning/Ending Liting Weng	33	Dear Fellow Prisoners Liting Weng		
21	The Hours Jenny Chai	35	Counting Tides Deborah Lin		

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the 18th issue of Project+, we focus on the immobility in time and space and the frustration that it generates, in academic settings and in artistic outlets. Initially inspired by the concept of the time loop, this issue hopes to expand the concept to include immobility in its different forms: as literary fantasies and as real-life obstacles.

As literary students in Taiwan during an on-going pandemic, we endeavor to connect our exploration of immobility and look for immobility in academic settings and in artistic outlets.

In this newsletter, we bring you interviews, reviews of films and exhibitions that deal with the concepts of immobility and time loops, and a collection of creative writing from the students of the Graduate Institution of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

Interview with Dr. Manuel Herrero-Puertas

This issue opens with our interview with Dr. Herrero-Puertas about his current research. He shared with us his experience as a scholar, advice for graduate students, and his thoughts on the impacts the pandemic might have on universities, the academic community and disability studies.

Grad Student in Action: EALA 2021 & Situations 2022

Following the interview, we have two stories about recent academic conferences. We spoke with students who have participated in these events about their experience and advice for their peers.

New Beginning/ Ending

This article delves into the re-imagination of the time loop with a discussion of the film *Palm Springs* and series *Russian Doll*.

They articulate a more humanized imagination where the characters embody more diverse reactions to their situations with a twist on a well-established trope.

Entangled but Alone

This article looks at immobility in the context of mental distress in *The Hour* and explores the inner turmoils and coping mechanisms of characters who have become mentally ill from being physically confined or losing autonomy.

Rationalize or Mystify?

Gaia: Gene, Algorithm, Intelligent Design,
Automata: A Mirage Self, the Other Realm

touches on the boundary between myth and reality. With the help of technology, artists (re)construct what might have been and what may be and experiment with the limitations of the human body, technology, and civilization.

Interview: Three Mouths Three Tongues

To explore immobility outside of the academic environment, we reached out to *Three Mouths Three Tongues*, a podcast run by three DFL alumni, to discuss their experience of connecting with the Taiwanese audience and working remotely during the pandemic.

Creative Writing

Resonating with the theme of immobility and frustration, we welcome creative writings from four writers. The collection includes "Yet Another Letter of Apology" by Ting-mao C., "The Nanny" and "Migrants" by Savanna, "Counting Tides" by Deborah, and "Dear Fellow Prisoners" by Liting.

We would like to thank our advisors Dr. Alexander Paulsson Lash and Dr. Chang-Min Yu for their help, and Dr. Herrero-Puertas for kindly agreeing to our interview request. We would also like to thank Dr. Hsin-ying Li the department chair and Megan Lee for the coordination to make this issue happen. Finally, we would like to thank the contributors of the issue for trusting us with their works, and to you, our readers, for taking time to read our issue.

We hope you will enjoy this issue!

March 2022



Savanna
Editor Visual
Design



Jenny
Editor



Liting
Editor



A CONVERSATION WITH DR. MANUEL HERRERO- PUERTAS

Gothic Access, Disability Studies,
and Writing Tips, Oh My!

By Savanna Lai
Photo By Liting Weng

We met with Dr. Manuel Herrero-Puertas, on a bright and sunny Friday afternoon and conducted our conversation in an open classroom. Dr. Manuel Herrero-Puertas is Assistant Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University. When still a child, he was always interested in books and reading and decided to study the closest thing to literary studies in Spain—English Philology (now renamed as Foreign Languages and Literatures). He briefly discussed his time studying abroad and his entry into the job market, aiming for a job that would allow him to balance teaching and research. In an hour-long conversation we discussed bridges between disability and gothic studies, Covid-19 and immobility, Ellen Samuels' article "My Body, My Closet," and compared the eating habits of children in nineteenth-century New York City and contemporary university students.

SL:

Do you want to talk about your recent talk ("Roderick's Studio, Madeline's Coffin, and Other Tales of Gothic Access") and your upcoming research?

MHP:

The talk was a hybrid of two articles. One of them is already published and the other one is coming out later in the year. It's part of a longer book project in which I'm thinking about intersections of gothic studies and disability studies. These two fields have come together in ways that are too predictable. When we talk about disability and the gothic, we have been stuck with monstrosity, with psychoanalytic frameworks where everything is [about] abjection or repression or the uncanny. I have been thinking about space and accessibility, how we design and occupy our material and ambient environments.

Once I started re-reading classic gothic novels and re-watching horror movies with this in mind, I noticed that these gothic spaces can feel very liberating from a

"...gothic spaces can feel very liberating from a disability perspective because they are always changing and unpredictable: **they collapse; they come back; they evolve.**"

disability perspective because they are always changing and unpredictable: they collapse; they come back; they evolve.

SL:

So are you going to be doing further research on this in the future, or are you going to branch out and do something completely different from time to time?

MHP:

For good or bad, I need to have two projects going on at the same time, so this is, I would say, my main project. On the side I have a series of conference papers that I try out and see if they work and, depending on their reception, I decide whether to turn them into fully-fledged articles.

I have one on junk food in the nineteenth century, examining street children from the working classes; it's more of a biopolitical argument about how—same as today—fast food keeps us alive but doesn't make us healthy. It leaves us in this odd limbo.

SL:

Is the essay about food and literature?

MHP:

Mostly about New York City street boys and girls, newsboys, bootblacks, and all these kids trying to make a living and having to grow up before their time. It was rarely the case that they would starve to death, but they precariously existed on cakes, greasy beef, lots of coffee...

SL:

[Laughing] That sounds like my diet.

MHP:

Right! It's uncannily contemporary. And the way they're portrayed in certain novels by Horatio Alger Jr., sentimental novels, even gothic novels!

These kids are plucky. They have a plan, courage, and resources to survive. That nonetheless obscures or deviates from the fact this diet is working against them. So once you turn to sociological studies of the era and explore their environments, you learn that these new eating habits and the increased availability of certain food items created serious health problems back then, same as now.

SL:

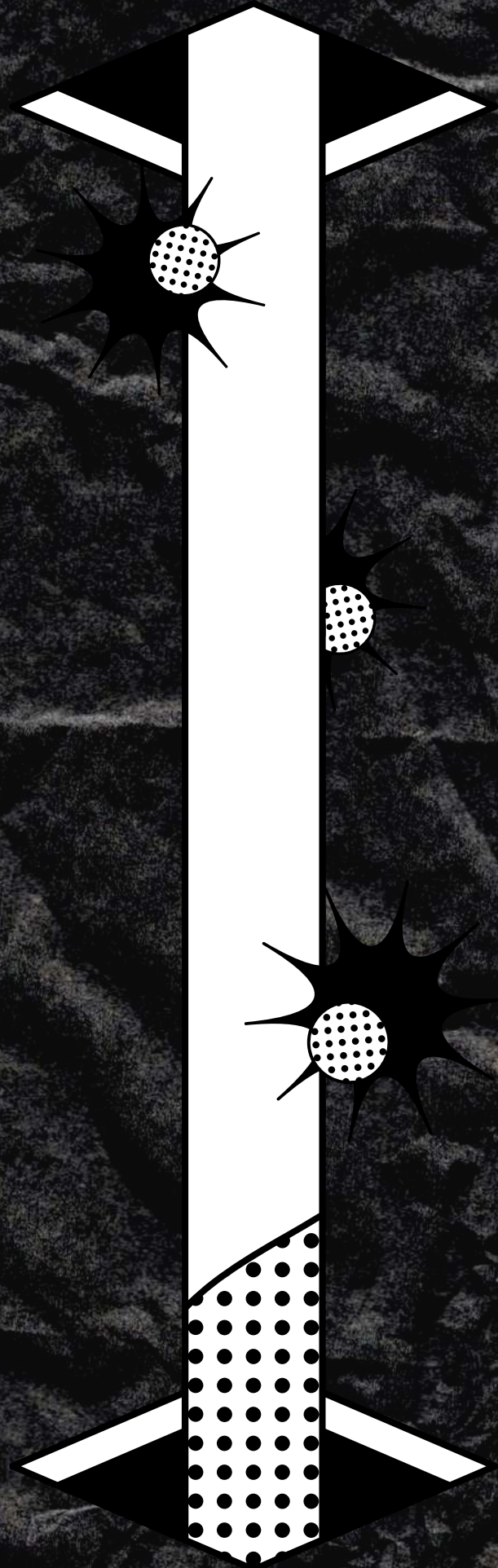
I feel like you have so many different, really cool, and interesting research projects. And I remember you published one last semester about superheroes. I was just wondering because you have so many ideas going on, do you have any experiences with roadblocks or writer's block? If so, how do you overcome them?

MHP:

I'm always happy to talk about writing because it's so scary. The first part of the question is about ideas for projects, though. I'm a nineteenth century Americanist. I care—I have to care!—about historicization. But I try not to stay there. Instead, I use nineteenth-century American literature in order to rethink or defamiliarize problems that we continue to have today. So, you know, junk food is one of them.

When I wrote the superhero piece—and, I have to say I'm not a superhero connoisseur; I haven't even watched the Marvel movies—I just became interested in *why* we are so invested in superheroes. Why *now* are we paying so much attention to these multiverses, sagas, and whatnot? What I found is that this has to do with a crisis of democracy, of our belief in the power of democracy to work, to solve problems, to get things done. When you talk about democracy in the nineteenth century, you have to bring Walt Whitman into the picture. I ended up thinking of Whitman as a superhero. It's a deeply ahistorical provocation, but the most exciting scholarship I read is always doing that: using whatever is left from the past to shed light on the present.

As for writing and writer's block, to me it's a question of understanding the stages of the process. Right now I'm in a stage where I can consider myself successful if I take some notes every day, and churn out a paragraph or a little summary. If I do that, I can pat myself on the back, call it a day, and move on to something else like grade papers or plan class or read more. I don't set out every morning to produce high-octane, publishable academic prose of the finest order. That usually happens in the last stretch of a project. But it's important to me that the process is always happening, that I never distance myself too much from writing. To me, anxiety comes from not writing. I have partly learned to overcome this anxiety by compulsively reading books about writing, books by Eric Hayot, Stephen King, William Zinsser, etc. Roy Peter Clark's *The Art of X-Ray Reading*



should be shitty. Terrible. Everybody's first draft looks like that. And then you go back and tinker with it until you get it where it needs to be. But that first step is the hardest. The sooner you get it done, the better.

SL:

True. I think this has a lot to do with the topic for our publication this semester, especially when we're talking about immobility in terms of time and space. Space refers to outside forces or even just the space we occupy. I was wondering, why do you think people are drawn to these tropes that have to deal with the idea of immobility surrounding time and space? I even consider being stuck in everyday routine to be a sort of immobility. Even just being stuck in traffic, I think, is also a form of immobility.

MHP:

This is a productive moment to think about immobility because COVID-19 democratized non-access. One day, without warning, thousands of people were told they couldn't go to class, hang out at a coffee shop, or take public transportation. And, you're right, all of a sudden you've become a prisoner. You're feeling this immobility. For many this has been a traumatic experience, taking a toll on our individual and collective psyche.

But we should not forget people with disabilities have experienced this for a long time. Going from place A to place B entails, for many in this collective, having to consider everything in advance. Is place B accessible enough? Does it have an entrance ramp? Are there Braille signs? If it's a movie theatre, will the film feature closed captioning? Would one be able to function in that space? So, with the pandemic, those of us from a non-disabled majority had to grapple very quickly with being in that position.

As a result, we all started to redefine "accommodation." And it's not like we had to invent radically new technology. We had Skype before the pandemic. We had Zoom.

inspired me while completing my latest article. I highly recommend it!

I have also learned to create a time and place where writing feels less of an ordeal. I'm a morning person, so I usually write two hours in the morning and block off everything else. I've grown very protective of my writing time. This doesn't always work. There are good writing days and bad writing days. But I don't have to feel guilty about not doing it. I feel a lot of our students—and maybe you relate to this! [laughter]—enter this vicious circle of not writing and feeling guilty, which always leads to more non-writing. So lose the fear. Write. As Anne Lamott says, your first draft

We had Blackboard and other tools for online teaching. A lot of people with disabilities, especially activists, have been asking for these accommodations for decades, to no avail. So the pandemic proved these accommodations can work. You can have online teaching or even work from home. There are so many ways in which we can negotiate this new way of being together. Now that things are returning to normal, these accommodations continue to be denied to many students in the U.S. because of the obsession with returning to in-person classes. This has meant that many vulnerable students and faculty with disabilities have to go to the classroom in places without a mask mandate or even a vaccination mandate. We're sliding back into the old routine of not thinking about accommodation, only during moments of crisis. But crisis is the new normal.

SL:

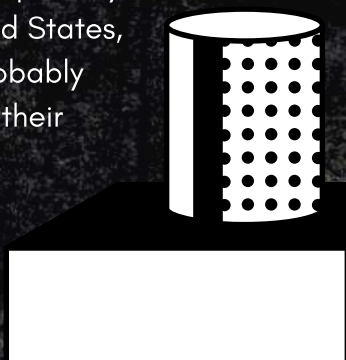
I feel like what you're saying is kind of like how when we tell people to put themselves in other people's shoes you'll begin to see how other people feel especially for those who are disabled. It reminded me of Ato Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness*, where he talks about this break in our wired circuiting. Regular able-bodied people are experiencing what disabled people experience daily. This giant shift changed their entire life. But I kind of feel sad because now that everything is going back to normal, especially in the United States, they'll probably erase all their efforts

[Dr. Herrero-Puertas agrees] and go back to what was normal for them without disability rights in mind.

MHP:

The pandemic imposed a very gothic estrangement, putting our ordinary, everyday lives under a very different light for us to realize what is at stake. Consider, for example, traveling to a conference and getting on a plane. All these mobilities. All these prerogatives we take for granted. They take a toll on the environment. They are sustained by deeply exploitative forms of labor and economic inequalities. If we can take something away from the pandemic, is the shock and defamiliarization, the precondition for starting to do things differently.

I can remember traveling to a conference and missing my connecting flight. I couldn't get to my panel on time. I remember telling the organizers: "Look, I can connect with you. I'm in a hotel room. I can give my paper from here. We have the technology." I was told that conference regulations prohibited off-site presentations. Well, it's 2022 and we're all off-site. This means an imperative to rethink academic conferences and other habits in our profession.



SL:

Speaking of virtual conferences, can you give us your experience at these virtual conferences and what you think of the future of academic conferences, especially with virtuality in mind?

MHP:

It's a big question! [I laugh] I wouldn't dare to make any predictions. I saw an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and the headline was something like "The Conference is Dead." So, I guess the academic conference as we know it is dead. I think there is something to celebrate and something to regret here. I do miss going to conferences, traveling, and the informality of bumping into new people, introducing yourself—that whole socializing aspect. Some online conferences have virtual coffee rooms where you can hang out and talk [I laugh]. It's not the same thing. It's not a coffee room. It's a chat room.

Conferences also bring fresh ideas and inspiration, which has always worked great for me in giving me stamina. So I miss that. I don't know what the future holds, but certainly, the hybrid conference is becoming more sophisticated. You do miss that face-to-face interaction. But, I am speaking as an able-bodied man, so if you ask around, you will get different answers.

SL:

How do you think physical or mental immobility, especially during the time of COVID will affect our reading or writing of contemporary literature in the future or even now? Have you seen any examples of this happening recently?

MHP:

It goes both ways. In a few years we can expect a bevy of novels about the pandemic. They will call it, I dunno, "Lockdown Fiction" or "Covid Fiction." I was watching a movie the other day and thought about the strangeness of nobody wearing masks [I laugh]. Ten years from now, if you're making a movie based on 2020 or after, you'll have to show tons of

masks. Every extra should wear a mask! It's a whole new mode of socialization and organizing space, time, and infrastructure.

Regarding the other part of your question, I think we're doing that already. A former colleague of mine, Julia Dauer, just published an amazing piece on reading Edgar Allan Poe's "The Mask of the Red Death" in the time of Covid-19. So this is another way of looking at the past and thinking about how epidemics unfolded before. The nineteenth century in the United States was punctuated by outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever, infectious diseases that were quickly racialized and used to demonize people from the Caribbean, China, etc. To certain extent, we're falling into the same patterns of stigma and racism.

SL:

Are there any connections between your research interests on political fantasy and also on gothic or disability studies?

MHP:

I'm relatively new to gothic studies. I'm not so new to disability studies. I've been catching up and trying to read and build my knowledge of the field. I think there's an assumption, when you read authors like Poe, about a generalized obsession with confinement. This happened with the pandemic, too. All of a sudden, you can't leave the house. To put it in Poe's terms, you have been "buried alive." Such a recurrent scenario involves waking up in a coffin and having to endure such a claustrophobic nightmare. But the more I read into the gothic, into Poe, into people like Horace Walpole, texts like *Dracula*, and the classic horror films I've always loved, the more I noticed terror lies not so much confinement, but escape. What would it mean to live in a world where everybody could be anywhere? That's the premise of so many horror movies, this idea that walls and bars cannot contain evil threats. There is this kind of radical otherness that cannot be constrained. When you look at this from a disability studies perspective, it is no longer a threat. It is an invitation to rethink

access.

SL:

This reminded me a lot about a topic that we've discussed in one of my undergraduate disability studies courses where we look at characters on the evil side from a normal point of view. When we look at characters such as Dracula, Frankenstein's creature, or even just Disney characters such as Quasimodo, we see them as not normal. Normal then becomes this term that ostracizes and estranges people. But when we think about normality, normality isn't this sort of two-sided juxtaposition where we see the weirdos on the bottom and normal people on top. In reality, how we see normality is through a bell curve because we tend to forget that we also see people who are more intelligent, geniuses, as abnormal. But because we so highly regard them by placing them on an imaginary pedestal, we tend to forget that they are also not normal. I think this idea pairs very well with gothic literature and today's topic.

MHP:

Yes! There's a blurry line between superability and disability. So part of what may be scary about disability is a skill or talent that appears to us exponentially developed. Gothic monsters are, of course, terrifying because society cannot define, much less contain, their metamorphic, bodies. When it comes to these gothic figures, a part of us would like to be like that, to have those powers. The gothic then becomes this repository of fantasies and anxieties, which are just two sides of the same coin. But it can be very hurtful.

SL:

It is.

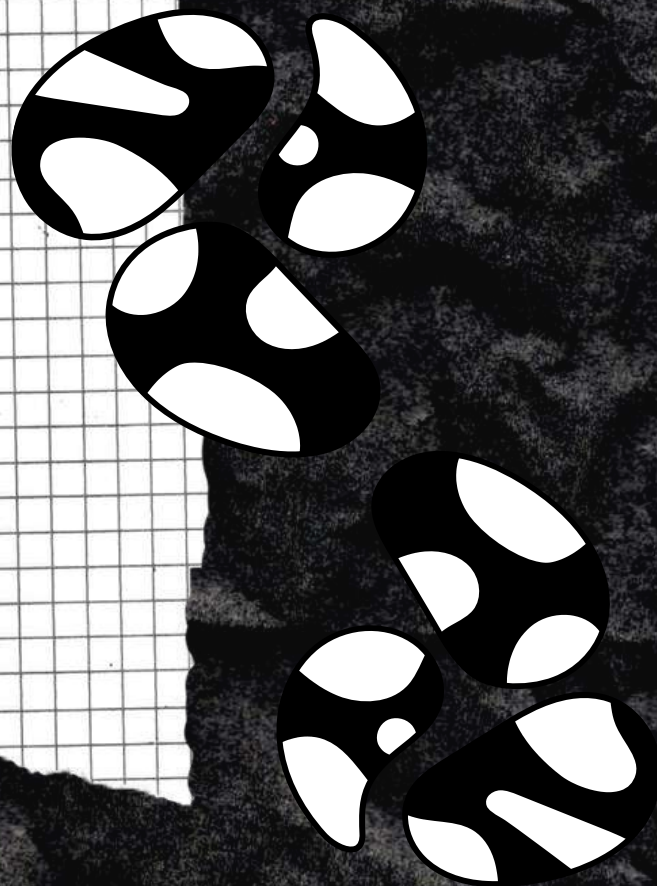
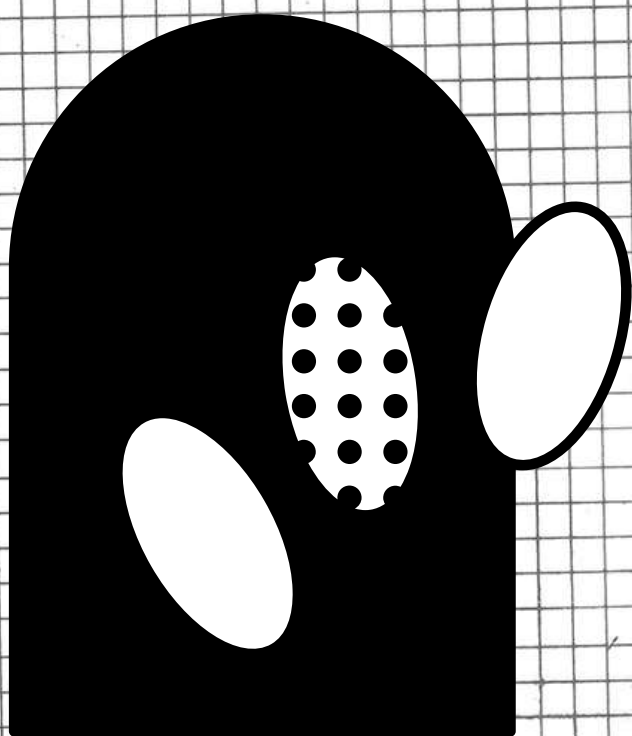
MHP:

to people with disabilities. In the end, it is another form of stigma. Moreover, it creates an expectation for someone with a disability to rank above normal, to display a secret talent.

This kind of pressure does a lot of harm. What happens if you're in a wheelchair but you're not Stephen Hawking? You're deaf but not Beethoven? Why do we expect people with disabilities to compensate for their alleged flaws with some kind of genius-like attribute? Such an expectation proves particularly damaging in educational contexts.

SL:

I think there are also limits to coming out with a disability especially if the disability or illness is something that people can't physically see. For example, it can be like I'm talking to you even when we've been friends for five years, and then all of a sudden I come out with the fact that I have a disability. I think as humans, we go back to the idea of the break in our circuiting. Even though I've known you for years, with this new information, I'll immediately see you in a different way. And because humans are so prone to wanting to fix things, you'll automatically change directions and just want to fix yourself in order to be able to talk to your friend or change yourself with this information in mind even though it's the same friend you've known for the last five years. So I think the problem with making your invisible disability visible by coming out to others is also this very potentially limiting thing.

**MHP:**

Absolutely. There's this great article on coming out as disabled [SL realizes they're talking about the same article and agrees] by Ellen Samuels, one of my mentors. Some of the dynamics involved relate to what you mention: condescending reactions and most people not having a clue about how to deal with someone close who comes out as disabled. That usually has to do with mental health. That's the hierarchy of disability. The wheelchair is very noticeable, but when we talk about mental health or neurodiversity, many can pass as non-disabled. When or how you decide to come out is a big deal.

I've been thinking about how much of coming out entails the sharing of a diagnosis and whether there are any alternatives to that. As a teacher, whenever I have students who require disability accommodations, I don't need to know their exact diagnosis or clinical profile.

I just need to know what I should do and what I shouldn't do as instructor, triggering factors to avoid and useful tips to follow.

SL:

I think this is also a type of immobility for those who feel pressured or the need to come out to others. But also, you don't need to come out to others if you don't want to. Overall, I think the general motif for our entire conversation today is the idea of putting yourself in a new space or atmosphere, experiencing it, and then reflecting on it to help both you and those around you. I think change is pretty. I think it's beautiful.

On October 30th 2021, the English and American Literature Association (EALA) hosted its 29th annual conference based on the theme “The Immaterial.” EALA received an abundance of submissions from across the globe, and we are proud to share the experiences of three second-year graduate students at the Graduate Institute of Foreign Language and Literature, Jardin, Ho-Shiuan, and Alison, who presented their papers at the conference, specifically on the panel “Dementia and Memory: Cognition and Impairment in Contemporary Narratives.”

Trying something new always takes a little bit of courage. Was this your first time attending a conference and what encouraged you to present at last year's EALA conference?

Jardin: My first conference experience was presenting at the Taiwanese Feminist Scholars Association, so EALA is my second experience with presentations. The main reason the three of us submitted our papers is because we were all greatly encouraged by Dr. Chen Chung-Jen to take a chance at presenting our ideas in a conference when we took his seminar Memory, Aging, and Life Writing.

Ho-Shiuan: When I was in college, I went to a conference held by Taiwanese Association for Digital Humanities with my group members as poster presenters for a class called Digital Humanities. However, EALA is my first literature-related conference.

Alison: EALA is the first time I presented at a

conference, and it is mainly because of Dr. Chen Chung-Jen's influence.

Can you briefly summarize how you came up with your topic ideas?

Jardin: My paper, “Forsaken, Forgotten, Forgiven: The Responsibility of Memory in Alice Munro’s Short Story” was on Munro’s “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” (2001). We watched a lot of videos concerning the issues of dementia that semester, one of which was adapted from Munro’s story. Throughout the semester I kept finding myself returning to the discussion about the responsibilities of people who were living with dementia. Many of the films we watched depicted patients who committed deplorable acts before they developed dementia but are oftentimes acquitted because they no longer remember their past actions. With their memories, their responsibilities are forsaken. In Munro’s short story, this

**STUDENT
IN ACTION:
EALA 2021**

By Jenny Chai



Source: EALA Official Website



issue is discussed at length, and that's what inspired my research. The question that I initially wanted to focus on was whether dementia patients should be responsible for their actions, but this turned out to be too complicated of an issue to explore, so in the end I based my question on whether other people had to be responsible for the actions they inflicted onto people who were living with dementia.

Ho-Shiuan: In this project, "Representation and Narrating Act in Dementia Discourses," I wrote about the 2017 film *Lear on the Shore* directed by Masahiro Kobayashi, which is a modern Japanese adaptation of *King Lear*. The narrative technique of the film is very serene and peaceful, and it also employs a lot of dramatic monologues that remind me of a written account, which I found to be interesting. Since I'm particularly interested in life writing, or the curing effect that the act of recounting one's experiences holds, one of the scenes which depicted the 84-year-old protagonist looking back on his life in a conversation with his estranged daughter really captured me and made me want to base my research on this film.

Alison: My interest concerning this paper, "The Evolution of Care in *Ran* and *Lear on the Shore*," was in exploring what types of care can be deemed more ethical for the elderly and for those living with dementia. I examined the intersection between the care-taking ethics of the West and the concept of filial piety from Eastern Confucianism in Kobayashi's *Lear by the Shore* (2017) and Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985). Specifically, I applied Tom Kitwood's theory of dementia care on the two films to analyze and explore how the unconscious depersonalization of the

cared-for by the caregiving can threaten the mental health of the former and become a malignancy.

One of the reasons that attending a conference can feel daunting is because of the amount of work it entails. How much time did you spend preparing for this conference? Did you find it difficult to take care of other responsibilities in the meantime?

Jardin: After we completed our final papers for the seminar and revised them, we only had to spend a couple of days drafting up the abstracts. After our abstracts were approved by the conference committee, we helped each other revise their papers, drafted our presentation speeches, and finally pre-recorded the presentations, which took around 2 weeks.

Ho-Shiuan: Ultimately, it wasn't too time-consuming and stressful since our conference papers were also our final papers for the seminar. Our papers were already completed before we submitted our abstracts to the conference, so our main preparation went toward paring down our work so that it was concise enough for a 20-minute presentation.

Alison: We only had to make brief revisions to our papers, and these processes mainly took place during the winter and summer breaks. We submitted our papers at the beginning of February and presented them in October, so it wasn't a big problem balancing school with the conference at all.



What did you find the most challenging in this experience?

Ho-Shiuan: I would say that for me, the hardest part was turning my paper into a 20-minute speech. My paper had to be trimmed down a lot, but at the same time, I had to make sure all of my key concepts were covered in a logical and coherent manner. That was quite difficult to achieve in a limited amount of time.

Alison: I didn't struggle too much during the actual research and writing process, but during the Q&A session in the conference, one of the professors directed a question towards me and Ho-Shiuan which I found incomprehensible. I wouldn't have known how to reply if Ho-Shiuan had not thankfully stepped up to answer the question for the both of us.

"You live and learn," as the saying goes. However, sometimes we take advice from other people to avoid making the same mistakes they did. Any tips or suggestions you want to share with aspiring conference-goers?

Jardin: I would recommend having a completed paper first before submitting an abstract to a conference. Try to invest your energy into constructing a strong term paper for your seminars, then you can confidently explore different calls for papers on related topics without having to stress about whether you will actually be able to finish the paper or not.

Ho-Shiuan: For graduate students, it is especially helpful to submit your papers with your classmates in the form of pre-formed panels. For this conference, the three of us were able to form a panel and submit as a group, so it felt a lot less daunting because we all had emotional support from each other.

Alison: My tip for other students who are hesitating in taking the first step is also to consider forming panels with your classmates or friends. It will be especially helpful if the people you decide to form a panel with are in the same seminar as you, because it makes it easier for you all to find a common underlying theme in your research papers, and thus your chances of being selected by the conference committee is raised.

STUDENT IN ACTION: SITUATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2022

By Weng Liting

2022 Situations International Conference for Graduate Students is yet another conference that took place online during the pandemic. This year, we have four participants, Jess Chen, Alice Tsai, Yu Xuan Chong, and Liting Weng from the Graduate Institute of Foreign Language and Literatures. I had a little chat with Alice and Yu Xuan to share our thoughts on the experience.

The Situations Conference, titled *Antagonism in Asia: The Fault-Lines of Conflict in an Interdependent World*, welcomed 17 presenters and two keynote speakers to a fruitful Zoom conference on 18th and 19th February. The sessions explored ethnic groups, wars, geographic rivalry, superpowers, and recent democratic struggles in Asia. Presenters from different disciplines and institutes shared their research about topics including the Vietnam Wars, Korean War, Indonesian mass killing, Post-cold-war Malaysia, White Terror, Japan-colonised Taiwan, and Comfort Women. Each panel honed in to address specific aspects of the history and reality of Asia.

What did we write about?

Alice's paper discusses the representation of difficult knowledge in two documentaries about the mass killing in Indonesia between 1965 and 1966. The *Act of Killing* (2012) and *A Look of Silence* (2014) approach the perpetrators and survivors of the horrific era, respectively. Her presentation was perhaps one of the most powerful, showing a clip of the

documentary in which a perpetrator reenacts the horror of his past actions. Through a detailed examination of dialogues and arguments made in the documentaries, Alice propelled her listeners to face the unsavory questions that should challenge our faith in our goodness.

Yu Xuan wrote about Fred Him-San Chin's memoir *Facing the Calamity: A Step through Hurts and Hardship and Looking Beyond for Generations to Come* (2020). In this biography, Chin recounts his experience in Taiwan during the White Terror era as a Malaysian overseas Chinese student and his predicament after being subjected to torture and imprisonment. Yu Xuan comprehensively combs through the anti-communist sentiments in Malaysia and the Republic of China (ROC) in the period and the ROC's attempt to Sinicize overseas Chinese students. In an overarching sense, Yu Xuan elaborates on the significance of Chin and his memoir to the transitional justice endeavors in Taiwan.

Liting's paper focuses on Shawna Yang Ryan's novel *Green Island* (2016) and its portrayal of traumas across three generations of the narrator's family. The novel covers a great chunk of Taiwanese history and makes it an interesting text to discuss the legacy of traumatic memories in the families of politically prosecuted victims. I trace the transmission of trauma within the family despite its lack of tangible evidence. I am interested in how, instead of fading

into history, the unspoken memories remain powerful and harmful to the younger generations.

The Experience

While having the opportunity to discuss our research was wonderful, it was also fascinating to learn new information and be inspired by other presentations. So, I asked Yu Xuan and Alice to share some of the most memorable elements during the conference.

Yu Xuan appreciated the assigned discussant who supplied him with the information about how the study of Malaysian victims in Taiwan's White Terror was received and how transitional justice was understood in the academia in Malaysia. The assigned discussants were indeed of great help to the presenters. Since they were familiar with the papers they were assigned to comment on—some were even working on similar subjects—the discussants were quick to come up with feedback and questions for the presenters. Although there wasn't always time to delve into more serious discussions, having discussants, at the very least, effectively prevented the speakers' frustration of receiving no responses.

On the other hand, Alice was surprised at how quickly everything happened. After we submitted our manuscripts for consideration, we received emails of acceptance to the conference in a couple days and the meeting took place eleven days later. She was even more surprised when she learnt that there was a contest for the best speakers, which she unknowingly won. The almost overwhelmingly speedy pace of the conference, perhaps not-so-surprisingly, made us turn to each other for help.

Friends Make Conferences Better?

During the first week of this semester, one week before the conference, Yu Xuan, Alice, Wendy and I decided to set up Zoom calls to rehearse. The two rehearsal sessions we held over Zoom were helpful. We each did a practice presentation and

made suggestions on others' slides and speeches. We mostly focused on making the layout and content of the slides more succinct so that they would be easier to read for the audience. Sometimes, Sometimes, however, we also go into the phrasing and arguments of the presentation.

Rehearsing is one of the things that we would consider doing again in the future before presenting. We applied to Situations because we were in the same seminar two semesters ago and our papers were essentially the final papers or a revision of them from Dr Guy Beauregard's Postcolonial Studies: Representing Transitions. Although we are in different stages of graduate school, we had some idea about each other's project from the discussion in the seminar and were thus more capable of providing feedback.

The feedback and, perhaps more importantly, the support from our peers soothed the worries. Alice, in particular, emphasized the benefits of working with friends through the revisions. In her experience, discussing with others helped her familiarize with the materials and established the logic behind her arguments. As she revised her presentation, comments from others pushed her to exceed the limitation that she placed on

herself. Therefore, she encouraged others who might be interested in presenting to embrace the possibilities and inspiration from friends.

Look Out! Look Where?

If you are also interested in participating in conferences, here are some things that we learned from this experience and thought that you might be interested in:

Look for Call-for-papers: The department often sends call-for-papers for conferences via emails. If you don't know where to start, the emails are worth checking out. If you have a term paper that you are especially proud of or interested in doing more research on, keep

Reach out to your friends: Going to conferences can be intimidating, especially so if you are new to the academic community. Applying to conferences with your friends can make a world of differences. Having people that you know and trust to discuss your work with and present during your talk can give you some peace of mind. They would also be good candidates to rehearse your presentations.

Rehearse: Presentations are challenging and doing it online is even more so. Simultaneously taking care of the slides, internet connection, and audio can be a hideous task. Try out the platforms on which the conferences are going to take place to familiarize yourself with the functions. Using the correct audio setting can help the



Source: Screenshot during the Situations Conference

an eye out for conferences about those topics. Working with a written term paper would significantly lessen your workload. You would also have a better sense of where to start according to the comments from your professors.

audience understand your speech better.

Be prepared: Always have a CV and short bio ready. Some of us went into panic when we were asked to provide a short bio before the conference started. Even if you're not asked to provide a copy of your CV or bio, it's always great to keep track of what you have achieved and give yourself a pat on the back!

Andy
SAMBERG

Cristin
MILIOTI

J.K.
SIMMONS

LIVE
LIKE
THERE'S
NO
TOMORROW

A hulu ORIGINAL FILM

Palm Springs

NEON hulu JULY 10 #PalmSpringsMovie

FROM AMY POEHLER AND NATASHA LYONNE

DYING
IS EASY

IT'S LIVING
THAT'S HARD

RUSSIAN DOLL

A NETFLIX ORIGINAL SERIES

FEB 1 | NETFLIX

Project + | March 2022

NEW BEGINNING / ENDING: REVIEW OF PALM SPRINGS (2020) AND RUSSIAN DOLL (2019)

By Liting Weng

Spoiler Alert: This review contains spoilers about the 2020 film *Palm Springs* and the 2019 Netflix series *Russian Doll*. Please proceed with caution if you have not yet watched them.

There is a sense of infallibility that comes with time. We may be lost in life, but we can always count on time to move on. We know that if we breathe in and breathe out, we can calm ourselves and wait for the moment to pass; if we lay down and wake up, we can trust the sun to rise again and the day to start anew. But what if the passing of time is not absolute? What if the moment never passes? Where do we anchor ourselves?

The time loop has inspired countless stories in which the protagonists might be trapped in specific settings until they somehow break the cycle, or they might discover a pivotal point in life that they cannot change without disrupting reality. Either way, the cyclical structure of the stories contradicts the traditionally linear understanding of time.

The trope of time loops has granted the audience many memorable scenes, leaving us in laughter and in tears. Thinking about the term time loop might remind you of the almost nightmarish repetition of "I Got You Babe" in *Groundhog Day* (1993), Agent J's

Palm Springs Poster
Source: Lonely Island Twitter

Russian Doll Poster
Source: IMDB



Hawaiian shirt and bathing suit give off vacation vibes, but their surroundings suggest loneliness.

Unlike the conventional narrative of time loop movies, *Palm Springs* starts with one of its protagonists Nyles—already stuck in the cycle—pulling the other protagonist Sarah (Milioti) into the loop with him. Overwhelmed by the never-passing wedding day, Nyles resorts to messing around with people to his heart's content with no consideration of consequences. By the time the audience meets him, Nyles has lived the day countless times and given up on escaping. As he imitates the guests' dance moves on the wedding night to impress Sarah, his eyes glint of omniscience and sadness. Being stuck in a time loop eventually wears Nyles down. Although, to be fair, giving up would perhaps be a more popular option to many, attempts to escape, more often than not, end in excruciating pain. Nyles's behaviors address the question: what if the character in the time loop does not actively seek a solution?

meticulous avoidance of bullets in *Men in Black* (1997), and countless shots of Emily Blunt pushing herself up from the floor as Rita Vrataski in *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014). It also brings us comically iconic scenes such as in *Palm Springs* (2020), where Nyles (Andy Samberg) learns everyone's dance moves, or breaking one's neck down the stairs as Nadia (Natasha Lyonne) does in *Russian Doll* (2019). The variety of time loop stories leads us to the question: what do time loops do? Or, rather, what can time loops do?

Does repetition turn luxury hotel rooms into prison cells or does it bring meaning back into mundane lives? This article chooses to address two of the more recent productions that reconsider the trope of time loop—*Palm Springs* and *Russian Doll*. The film and series attempt to bring changes to the well-established genre. An investigation into the two films allows a re-imagining of time loops.

Palm Springs

The juxtaposition of emptiness and vibrancy lies at the core of *Palm Springs*. As each day restarts, the audience is pulled through a rollercoaster of lively celebrations, followed by hollowness when the cycle resets. At first sight, everything about *Palm Springs* shouts romantic comedy, but the dark layers within make the film a fascinating one. Its bright-colored poster, which shows the protagonists in a lazy river between two strips of deserted land, at first sight indicates idle afternoons. Lounging in bright pink and yellow inflatable swimming rings, Samberg and Cristin Milioti look completely at ease in front of the backdrop of unpopulated land. Their sunglasses,

The formula of the plot bears some resemblance with dystopian fiction when we frame it this way: when Sarah joins Nyles in the loop, she disrupts his (un)desirable reality, meaning that although Nyles has grown complacent in the time loop, Sarah is immediately aware of the absurdity of the situation. Her inability to understand his content drives her to defy the situation they find themselves in. In this sense, *Palm Springs* demonstrates a new approach to this genre. Instead of looking to one's inner self for solutions, the film looks elsewhere. As Sarah educates herself to search for a way of escaping their situation, she embodies the outside force that leads to the ending of the time loop. Nyles and Sarah's return to the normal world indicates two things that in my mind are unaddressed in other time loop movies: firstly, there is a scientific way to escape the time loops—this is what the film shows—and secondly, bravery can come from others.

Russian Doll

Russian Doll, on the other hand, introduces itself to the audience in a more

conventional way. It faithfully follows the structure where the story starts as the protagonists enter the time loop and ends when they exit. Its ambitions lie in the way the story unfolds. *Russian Doll* is not afraid of complexity.

With eight episodes, the series is capable of covering a lot more ground than a two-hour film. *Russian Doll* tells the stories of two protagonists, starting from before they become companions in the time loop. Nadia and Alan (Charlie Barnett) are troubled strangers whose fates entangle when they cross paths without paying any mind to each other's predicaments. The pair embodies two extreme kinds of reactions to their shared fate. When Nadia rushes around New York City in search of ways to escape the loop, Alan faithfully repeats each day despite knowing how his day will end.

When the audience first meets Alan, he meticulously unpacks his suitcase and obsessively recites recorded self-affirmation, bringing to life a mechanical perfectionist, or as much as doing so is possible, given how robotic he appears to be. Alan is the epitome of a control freak who chooses control regardless of the pain that comes with it. His need for control is strong enough to stick to the routine that he knows leads to nothing but pain and death and cleanses himself of the memory of his first death. In comparison, Nadia's search for an escape route is desperate, willing to unearth the demons of her past. She is resolutely practical when she first finds herself in a time loop, examining the substances she takes on the night that she believes is the beginning of the time loop. As her and Alan's theories of what causes their predicament are proven wrong, Nadia faces her biggest fear—losing her mind. Her traumatic childhood catches up to her and forces her to remember the suicide of her mother.

As the title suggests, *Russian Doll* is a story with layers. Like other time loop stories, the series consists of cycles, but unlike other stories, Nadia and Alan do not have eternity

to go through trials and errors. The clock ticks as the items around them decay and the people disappear. The protagonists are pressured to solve the problem because they do not want to know what happens when they diverge from the "original" timeline for too long. The ending of the series, surprisingly, calls into question the notion of timeline. Instead of waking to a day anew and leaving the experience behind them, Nadia and Alan find themselves being tested once again. Knowing that this might be the last day of each other's lives, the time-loop-ed Nadia and Alan have to disrupt each other's plans for the evening regardless of the price. According to their decisions, two new realities emerge, challenging the conventional ending where the linear time is restored.

Palm Springs and *Russian Doll* are by no means groundbreaking work in the time loop trope, but they do provide interesting takes while working within the confines of the genre. Nyles and Alan do what many members of the audience of time loop movies might have thought of doing: not escaping. What happens when one takes full advantage of, to the verge of abusing, the lack of consequences in the time loop? What happens when one settles into a routine?

Nyles's and Alan's reactions to their situations are extreme opposites: While Nyles explores all the possibilities, Alan refuses to branch out at all. Ironically, although Alan looks collected, he is not unlike Nyles, in the sense that both of them surrender to the predicament. Alan's days



Source: POPTAIM

might be more structured than Nyles's, but the efforts they make to seek a solution are equally non-existent.

Compared to their male component, Nadia and Sarah have stronger motivations to take actions. As Nadia's loved ones disappear and she herself begins to bleed with no explanation, her cycles are numbered. The time pressure drives her to get to the bottom of everything, desperate to escape before missing her last chance. Sarah, on the other hand, does not have the luxury to start every cycle anew because she wakes up to a guilt-ridden situation each morning. Different from other protagonists who are able to transform themselves while staying in the time loops, Sarah's new beginning can only happen after escaping from the situation, when she no longer has to wake up to one of her wrong decisions.

Palm Springs's and *Russian Doll's* refreshing attempts to re-imagine the beginning and ending of time loops explore new ways of understanding time, apart from the traditionally linear structure. They showcase four--five, if we include Roy (J.K. Simmons) in *Palm Springs*, who we left out of this article--reactions to being trapped in time loops. The stories capture the diversity of human minds and give room to protagonists who dwell in grief and frustration upon disruptions in their lives, who are not inherently resourceful. Instead of projecting hope and positivity, these works are open to the infinity of possibilities and recognise vulnerabilities that are irrevocably human.



Source: Los Angeles Review of Books



Source: Film Affinity

ENTANGLED BUT ALONE: REVIEW OF THE HOURS (2002)

By Jenny Chai



The Hours Poster
Source: IMDB

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, travel bans have been issued and masks have become mandatory safety precautions; from these various bodily limitations it is only natural that a sense of lost agency will pervade the world. Reacting to this lost sense of autonomy, anti-mask protests and demonstrations against vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions are only among a sea of reactions. Especially in our time, where boundaries are placed everywhere and everyone has experienced feelings of limitation, frustration, and helplessness, we wanted to explore forms of boundary and limitation that appear in different circumstances. The 2002 film *The Hours* is adapted from Michael Cunningham's 1998 novel of the same title. Directed by Stephen Daldry, it features Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, and Julianne Moore, and received wide acclaim upon its release, receiving nine Academy Award nominations and winning Nicole Kidman an award for Best Actress.

The premise of the movie surrounds three women living in three different timelines, each taking place within a single day. The women's lives are linked together by their attempts to find meaning in their lives as well as by Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. In 1923 England, Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman) begins writing one of her best-received novels, *Mrs. Dalloway*, whilst battling mental illness. Despite her loving family and their meticulous care, Woolf feels stifled and suffocated by the countryside and desires to return to the bustling city of London, which her doctor and husband forbid in the belief that peace and quietness is the best remedy for her. In 1951 Los Angeles, Laura Brown (Julianne Moore) spends her day by preparing a cake for her husband's birthday whilst reading *Mrs. Dalloway*. Laura has an adoring family, her second child is on the way, and they share a suburban home with a white picket-fence, but beneath this facade Laura feels stifled by her family and domestic life. Lastly, in 2001 New York, Clarissa Vaughan (Meryl Streep) spends her day running around the city preparing for a party for her former partner and now friend, Richard (Ed Harris), but throughout the day she reflects on her unsatisfactory life. The three women all experience some sense of limitation and immobility in their lives, but their responses to these boundaries vary.

Physically, Woolf is very much confined to the space of her own home in the countryside, while her mental agency is also limited because of other people's treatment towards her. The extent of her restriction is extreme: she is not allowed to leave the house without permission from her husband and her eating habits are tracked. Her confinement is visually illuminated when, just before asking for permission to take a walk, the camera shows her to be framed by the glass door panels. After she's entered her husband's printing room, she stands anxiously at the very corner of the room,



Source: Film Grab

closed in by heaps of her husband's manuscripts, mentally preparing herself to ask for consent. Woolf's immobility is further emphasized through her sister's visit from London — she is not allowed to step outside her boundaries; other people have to come to her.

In a climactic argument between Woolf and her husband where she expresses her desire to leave the countryside, he tells her, "This is not you speaking, Virginia. This is an aspect of your illness. It's not you. It's not your voice. This is the voice that you hear." Through these assertions, he denies her agency and subjectivity. By reducing her to the conditions of her mental illness and letting these symptoms take over her identity, he is undermining her voice and ceasing to see her as an individual with her own thoughts and feelings. Woolf is therefore not only physically imprisoned in a place she has no desire to live in, her mental agency is also in custody. It is only through the act of writing, a process of mental stimulation, that Woolf finds a coping mechanism to counter her confinement and regain a sense of normalcy. The product of her writings amounts to *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel which deeply affects the remaining protagonists.

Laura Brown's seemingly ideal family life

is counterintuitively the cause of her dissatisfaction and alienation. Her feelings for her husband, Dan (John C. Reilly), are not based on romantic love but rather on a sense of obligation towards a man who was kind to her and who has braved the war and returned as a hero. Moreover, Laura has married Dan due to societal expectations for women to follow a certain path as kind and gentle wives, and it is this notion of obligation that causes her imprisonment. As Laura sends her husband off to work, the audience sees her boxed in by windowpanes and other household furniture, items that usually represent the comforts of home but ironically for Laura are suffocating threats. The juxtaposition between light and darkness further emphasizes the disparity between her outer pretense and inner confusion about her domestic life as a housewife.

Laura tries to bake a cake for her husband's birthday, but when her neighbor Kitty (Toni Collette) arrives, she notices and points out the cake's imperfections, lopsided with uneven icing. For Kitty, baking a cake is a "ridiculously easy" task that any ordinary person can perform, but for Laura it doesn't come naturally and she has to consciously put in the effort in order to create a pretty cake. The cake reflects Laura's struggles to perform the role of the



Source: Film Grab

flawless housewife, to live contentedly as a wife and a mother, and to lead a life which to many others resembles the American Dream. Overwhelmed by her domestic life, Laura goes to a hotel initially intending to commit suicide. After reading Mrs. Dalloway on the bed, she falls asleep and dreams of a flood of dark water rushing out from under the bed to envelop and drown her. This episode clearly resembles the ending in Doris Lessing's short story "To Room Nineteen": the protagonist, Susan, also a housewife paralyzed by her familial responsibilities, repeatedly returns to a shabby hotel room where she relishes in alone time. However, unlike Laura, Susan chooses eventually to end her life on the hotel bed, where the water in her vision parallels the one in Laura's as the agent of death: in her last moments, a dark and tranquilizing body of water carries Susan away. Upon waking up, though Laura decides to return to her family for the time being, she ultimately finds a different way to sever her connection with them, leaving her house one morning after giving birth to her second child.

Finally, Clarissa Vaughn, a woman who closely resembles the title character of Woolf's novel and who is also fittingly given the nickname "Mrs. Dalloway," feels stuck in her current life as well. Her day centers on preparing for a party and scampering around town running errands: first she goes to the flower shop to buy flowers that will brighten up her apartment; next, as part of her weekly routine she visits Richard, her former partner who is suffering from AIDS, to make sure he is comfortable; lastly she returns home to prepare and decorate for the party. However, throughout Clarissa's busy schedule there are certain moments

when she pauses for a second to reflect on her current life. These moments of reflection reveal that Clarissa finds her current life disappointing and unexciting. For her, a time when she had felt true happiness was when she was a young adult in love, when she possessed the exhilarating sense of unchecked possibility and of the notion that her life was just about to begin. However, she's lost that happiness and excitement since then, and her life has been reduced to tasks that she busies herself with for false comfort. Particularly, Clarissa is occupied with taking care of Richard and making him as comfortable as possible; even the party that she is throwing is a party for him. Her inability to make a change and break free from her current unsatisfactory life is explicated when she stands in the elevator of Richard's apartment: the audience gets an aerial view of her, and as we look down at her tiny figure boxed in by four cold metal walls, it becomes clear that the elevator is the object of agency as opposed to Clarissa herself. Instead of moving forward on her own accord, Clarissa seems to be pushed forward by an unknown force which propels her to fill up her schedule and the silence. The elevator moves Clarissa upwards, hinting at her own immobility and lost agency.

The three women in the film are all in one way or another stuck in their current ways of life, and their disillusionment becomes a cycle they have to face daily. However, by the end, Woolf chooses to take her own life, Laura abandons her family for a new independence, and Clarissa Vaughn finds peace with Richard's death and in turn is ready to start facing her own. In each of the women's lives, something significant happens on this day to break them free from their monotonous and depressing days and allow them the agency to take control of their lives. Though the film seemingly ends on a tragic note with Woolf's watery death, we should be reminded of the possibility that the water image brings: just as water represents death, it also liberates.

GAIA REVIEW

Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei
12 Feb. 2022 — 24 Apr. 2022
Curated by Shen Bo-Cheng

By Liting Weng



Source: MoCA

Ultramarine blue, neon green and bright orange bloom to form the main visual impact of the Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition *Gaia: Gene, Algorithm, Intelligent Design, Automata: A Mirage Self, the Other Realm*. The bold color-scheme brings a futuristic tone to the exhibition and leaves viewers slightly disoriented by the contradictory composition. Curator Shen Bo-Cheng invites visitors to explore the reciprocal relations of technology and myth. He believes that myth and futurology are similarly imaginative, even if they are drastically different in terms of the technologies that embody the imagination. With special focuses on defining life and the human and imagining paradise or utopia, the artworks propel viewers to reconsider the relations between humans and technology.

To answer Paul Gauguin's age-old questions that inspired the curation--

"Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?"--we cannot help but look back down the path that leads us to the place we are now (MoCA).[1] Starting off as one of the creatures on the surface of the planet, humans thrive and become a force capable of shaping the world around us just as it shapes us, for better and worse. Ralf Baecker's *A Natural History of Networks / SoftMachine* (2021) is composed of clips of electrochemical reactions, replicating the "primordial soup" of ancient earth where organic compounds are generated from inorganic substances. The flourishing visual effects convey the vigor that sparks evolution. Cheng Hsien-Yu's *Game of Life* (2022) brings to life John Horton Conway's cellular automation *Game of Life* (1970) and Olivier Auber's social network game *Poietic Generator* (1986). The piece has a robotic arm that draws and wipes away patterns on the glass surface between it and the viewers, symbolizing the emerging and decaying of

cells. While the device appears neutral and mechanical, the process captures a thread of mysticism entwined with the birth and death of creatures that the theory of evolution has yet to fully overcome.

Through the power of technology, artists construct a "mirage self" and redefine human organisms. This mirage challenges the notion of humans and how far one might be willing to stretch it. Juan Zamora's *Transplant* (2017–2021) presents its viewers with an

intersection of medical technology and nature. Inside a transparent case hangs resin-made leaf-like hearts that are connected to cords on the wall. Upon a closer look, dried blood has been clogged in the veins of the resin heart. The reconfiguration of hearts and plants is Zamora's response to newly developed heart transplant technologies, through which he imagines the possibilities of human lives. Amy Karle's *Internal Collection* (2016–2017) is another artwork that delves deep into human organisms. The pale-

coloured dresses glow in the dark room where they are exhibited. Immediately as viewers set their eyes on the intricate patterns, they would be enchanted by the mysticism of it. Somehow, the artworks become more captivating when they appear worn by humans, as we see in a recording that plays on the wall. The

dresses themselves interact with the curves and angles of human bodies and bring a new dimension to the piece of art.



Game of Life
Source: MoCA

Gaia looks to the past as well as to the future, where infinite possibilities lie. Wu Tzu-Ning's *Cyber Samsara APP* (2016) juxtaposes religion and technology, blurring the boundary between faith in the power of nature and that of men. While it – might be possible for viewers to decipher the genomic map, it is beside the point. By turning DNA structure into maps of fate, Wu reconsiders humanity's ability to epiphanise and potentially defy the force of nature, which is a

goal that we have been endeavoring towards since the infancy of science. The two pieces from Huang Yu-Hsiung's "Aphasia" Series (2019) contemplate the co-existence, or rather clash-es, of human and digital languages. Words on the screen are jumbled and fragmented to the point where their meanings are lost to the viewers. This is Huang's commentary on the overwhelming amount of information that we are force-fed and have no adequate ability to consume.

Looking Back or Looking Forward?

Gaia attempts to comprehensively reconfigure the history of nature and human civilization. The artworks embody uniquely abstract, yet formidable, reflections on the human condition. They reflect on our technological progress, the harm we have done to the world, or our possible futures. The

works are the artists' commentary on the world that we live in, but they are also an exploration into infinity. In the exhibition, past and future, science and myths, and civilization and nature coexist in ways that



Internal Collection
Source: MoCA



Transplant
Source: MoCA

might not be perceived as possible at first. These pieces of art are relevant in the modern world because they display our anxiety and fear, while staying untethered from the chains of reality.

Shen's curation is not satisfied with reflecting on the past nor with challenging the status-quo. Instead, he expresses his ambition to envision a utopian future. Among the artists that he invited to contribute to the exhibition, Shen reclaims the creators' mission to be pioneers and innovators. Inspired by Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Shen rejects the "mythical and unachievable utopia" and pursues a "scientifically and technologically achievable 'Brave New World'" (MoCA). A Huxleyan "Brave New World" may not be what everyone aspires to, but the sentiments remain applicable. The juxtaposition of science and humanism has no reason to hinder the progress of civilization, but has every reason to reciprocate with each other.

Technology is central to many pieces of the exhibition. New technological developments in medicine, chemistry, and computers inspired or created the artworks. The techniques employed may not have been the most cutting-edge, Shen concedes in a clip where he elaborates on his curation, but they symbolize the artists' endeavors to surpass the limitations of reality and imagine the unimaginable. In pieces such as *Transplant*, the flattened heart-shaped pieces echo the breakthrough discovery in cardiovascular repair surgery that inspired *Zamora*. It showcases the power of medical professionals' to create organisms according to their needs, yet the sterile set-up and the macabre dried blood question the future that this technology might lead to. Humans growing power to harness organisms pushes the boundary of mortality. This leads to the question that arose when galvanisation was discovered, and when the first cloned animal was created: are humans becoming God?

Humans are not creatures that are content with our place in the world. Throughout history, we have continuously attempted to master more crafts and harness more power. We sought to enhance our physical and mental performance as well as tried to channel power from nature. One of the most fascinating features of Gaia is its attempt to obscure the line between rationality and mysticism. They are two concepts that appear to be contradictory, but are often surprisingly overlapping. The distinctions between the two are perhaps more obscure now since humans have been obsessed with manipulating life. As we attempt to master technologies such as genetic engineering and perpetual motion machines, we are also exploring the possibility of crossing the limitations of human power.

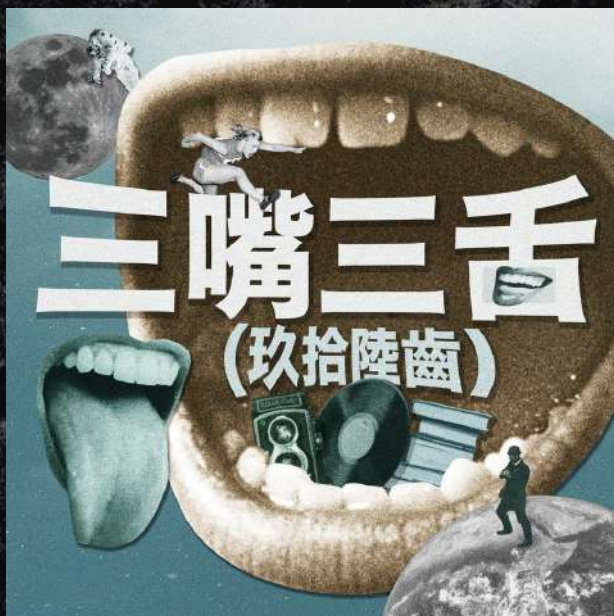
Unfortunately, we are likely not as powerful as we think we are. The time we live in now is a time where the surface underneath our feet is gradually turning into sand, the orders that ruled the old

world are crumbling in front of our eyes, and concrete beliefs are liquefying. When we imagine the future from our current position, nothing is certain. When scientific development surpasses the general public's comprehension, superstition supersedes knowledge. When a population is driven by fear, there is no faith in science, let alone in the rationality that has been the foundation of human civilization for centuries.

[1] Please visit MoCA's website for more information.

https://www.mocataipei.org.tw/en/ExhibitionAndEvent/Info/Gaia%60:*Gene,*algorithm,*intelligent*design,*automata_A*mirage*self,*The*Other*Realm





Source: Three Mouths Three Tongues

"THREE MOUTHS THREE TONGUES" INTERVIEW

A Project+ exclusive interview with the hosts of the "Three Mouths Three Tongues" podcast

By Jenny Chai

"Three Mouths Three Tongues" is a podcast hosted by three alumni of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at NTU. On their show, they invite us into their mix through conversation topics that range from films, TV shows, and book analyses to album and lyric discussions. In this article, we are proud to present an interview with Shuo, Mad, and Yu about their creation: from their thought processes regarding the making of an episode to the challenges they have had to face and break through.



Firstly, we are curious as to how you generally decide on your episode topics, and also if you initially had a certain media type in mind that you intended to focus your podcast on, since you call yourselves a "bookclub."

We brainstormed the title of our podcast first, trying to come up with a catchy name and an interesting theme. After deciding on "Three Mouths Three Tongues," we found it hard to discard the other titles that didn't make the cut, so we ended up developing them into different sub-series and categorizing various topic ideas under these series. We don't limit our podcast to a certain media, so we will cover anything and everything that we are interested in.

At the same time, we are also conscious about the variety of our topics and our target audience. For example, after the first few episodes, we started to realize that our topics were too varied and lacked coherence, so we made it our goal to discuss at least one film that is in theater every month regardless of whether we were interested in them or not.

Finding a common ground between what we like and what the target audience enjoys is also important to us, and since we feel that Taiwanese people are generally supportive of domestic films, we will make an effort to chat about them. In this process, we also found ourselves become more invested in domestic films because their quality seems to be improving year by year. Other than that, we also gravitate towards productions that are critically acclaimed, that have generated a lot of commentary, or even older films that are enjoying a second screening or are being featured on virtual film festivals.



Can you briefly walk us through how you develop or organize your discussions in an episode? In terms of films, what kind of topics do each of you gravitate towards?

There is a designated main host or hostess for each of our episodes. In our earlier days, how the episodes went depended on our idiosyncrasies. Now that we've had more experience, we've influenced each other and sort of settled on a format which goes from general introductions to detailed analysis and personal reflections. We prefer to ease the listeners into a topic by opening with general discussions, which gives listeners a bit of background information on not only the text, but also the extent of our knowledge in a particular field. Just as this method is helpful to the listeners, it is also helpful to us because it acts as a warm up which prepares us for further in-depth talks. Towards the end of each episode, we tend to bring the discussions back to ourselves by sharing our own opinions, which is nice because it engages those who care more about our subjective reflections as opposed to more technical-based analysis.

As for each of our preferences, we have come to realize that both Shuo and Mad tend to provide a lot of additional or background information that they find interesting, while Yu likes to analyze texts from the perspective of an actor, so she focuses on plot and characterization a lot.

Since podcast as a medium is limited to hearing, do you feel that it can sometimes be hindering your discussions? How do you cut across this boundary?

Choosing a podcast as our medium definitely has its limitations. Mad loves watching video essays, so at times we do feel that videos are really able to delve deep into a particular scene, but on the other hand, we have our own advantages as well. Even though our discussions are more limited towards plot, characterization, and thematic analysis, this helps us focus on these selected areas, and oftentimes there is already so much to say about these elements. As for the cinematography, we are able to discuss one particular shot, but the editing or camera movements are things we have to forgo. However, this is not too big of a hindrance, and in contrast to more technological discussions, we feel that our audience is more interested in plot, characterization, and other qualities that do not depend on visual elements to convey.

We notice that you have been more active on your Instagram page and that it has become more versatile. Can you elaborate on this? Is this a conscious effort to engage with your audience?

When COVID-19 cases suddenly surged in Taiwan last year, we started hosting live-streams on our Instagram page to engage with our audience, but as the pandemic gradually got controlled and people started returning to work, it became more difficult for our viewers to follow our live-streams since we all have different schedules. After that, we took a different approach and started sharing books, music, and films that we liked but which were not included in our podcast on our Instagram. Every month, we get to choose four topics to be featured on our podcast, but due to feasibility, a lot of creative works we cherish are eliminated because it is impossible to talk about everything we like. For example, if a TV series is too long, then it tends to get left out even if we think highly of it. By posting more regularly on Instagram, it allows us to not only diversify and liven up our page, it also helps us to share a lot more of our interests.

Another change for the better that we made to our Instagram page is to include pictures, such as album, film, and book covers, in our posts instead of our usual logo as the cover photo. We also



started to make clear the main themes of each episode in the Instagram caption so that it helps our audience easily determine whether they will be interested in an episode or not.

How was your experience recording remotely? How do you deal with keeping up a podcast during a time of pandemic restrictions?

Prior to the pandemic, we recorded all our episodes in Mad's room, with the three of us sharing one microphone. The idea of remote recording never even came to us, partly because we were all undergraduate students and were able to meet regularly. With the pandemic though, it was no longer a feasible option for the three of us, along with two other friends who helped us out, to crowd in a single room with the windows shut. Thus, we returned to our homes, and Yu and Shuo invested in their own microphones as well.

A difference in production is that since we used to share a single microphone, there was only one audio track to take care of, now that we have three microphones, the editing process complicates, but ultimately the quality of our production has improved. No matter how in-tune we are with each other, it's inevitable that we accidentally talk over each other sometimes. With three microphones, this problem can be eliminated through post-production. It's also been a lot easier to find the time to record now that we don't have to worry about long commutes and busy schedules. We have a lot more flexibility and freedom, so this is one of the things that the pandemic has forced us to change for the better.

As our theme for this issue of Project+ is the frustration and paralyzing emptiness that comes with immobility, do you have any recommendations for works of art that center around this concept?

Mad's recommendations include the 2010 Spanish psychological thriller *Buried* directed by Rodrigo Cortés, which centers around Paul Conroy (Ryan Reynolds), a truck driver who finds himself buried underground with limited tools and limited time to break free. The French *Dispatch* (2022) by Wes Anderson and the Italian romance film *L'Eclisse* (1962) by Michelangelo Antonioni both explore similar themes of existential crisis.

Yu recommends Mac Miller's posthumous album, *Circles* (2020), which explores the artist's desire for psychological growth and an escape from his own head, as well as *Nobody Knows* (2004), a Japanese film centering on 12-year-old Akira (Yuya Yagira) and his siblings, who are struggling to survive on their own in a small Tokyo apartment after their mother abandons them.

Shuo talks about a book that was featured on their podcast called *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* by Jonathan Haidt, which is a 2012 social psychological exploration of whether our agency comes from social ideologies or from purely our intuition. Shuo realizes that his subjective ideas might not be as subjective as he thought, that they are inevitably limited by social ideologies to a certain extent. Finally, the play *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekov (1898) also explores a man's bitter quest to find refuge outside his own mind.

YET ANOTHER LETTER OF APOLOGY

By Ting-mao C.

Most respected Mrs. Fletcher,

I am Rodrick Muller, one of your bad students from class ten. I am writing this letter to apologize for my bad behavior recently. I am very sorry that you feel angry at me because you don't like children.

I should not call you butt-face just because you have a ponytail. I know now that tails are actually attached to the butt on the same side, so you are not a butt-face but a horse-face. I am so sorry. Remy started that. He always thinks he's so smart, and he told us that your ugly broom-like hairstyle is called a ponytail, making your face a pony-butt. It is not nice to mock someone's appearance. You should punish him too.

I should not call Marty fat even if he looks like a pig. I am aware now that it is not nice telling the truth, and we should lie as much as possible. I am sure this is why you insist I write an apology letter. I am really really sorry. Again, Remy, Sarah, Ellie, Jenny, Tom, Tim, Gregory, Lucy, Sam, Flint, and Jack also called Marty a pig. It is not fair that I am the only one to be punished.

I am very sorry my last letters of apology had too many "so" and "very," although you want us to write more than five hundred words. Now I understand that "I am very very very very [. . .] very sorry" and "I am so so so so so so so [. . .] so sorry" and "I am really really really really really [. . .] really sorry" and "I am so so very really so very very very [. . .] really sorry" (Editor's note: Imagine all kinds of combination of really, very, so and multiply them until it reaches 500 words, you know kids) are not what you want, and you don't accept sincere apologies but fake ones. I will do better this time. I am sure this is why you teach English.

I am sorry I talked in your class when you asked us to be quiet. I felt an urge to tell all the other students how great you are. If you don't like compliments, I promise I'll change. But I was telling them how smart you are and discussing the novel you taught us in English class. I do not understand why you would hate compliments and stop us from reading literary work tentatively. I am so sorry that it irritates you. I will never say anything again in your class, especially not saying: "Mrs. Fletcher is trying to hypnotize us to kill each other by teaching Lord of the Flies."

I should not eat and drink in your class. I cannot resist. I was hungry. It is not very nice of you delaying our break time while talking about the kids in Lord of Flies munching pork chops, but I guess you can do whatever you want as an adult. It is not nice for kids to do the right things while the adult wants the bad ones. I have learned my lesson. However, Mr. Franklin said we should drink as much water as possible, because it would make us healthy and strong. Why do you stop us from being healthy? You don't have to answer, I am sorry.

I am sorry I fought with Remy. But he is so annoying and stupid like the fat boy in Lord of the Flies. You really should punish him. No one should play with him. Remy always acts like he is a good kid, but he is the worst. Believe me, you will need to punish him. He is worse than I. Remember the time when all the chalks were soaked and you were angry about the prank? It was Remy! He was trying to "please you" by cleaning the black board. He was bad and stupid, and he said it was I who did the prank. That's Remy's stupidity, not mine! If I am to prank you, I will put the eraser on the door and the eraser will fall on you, but that is not the case. So it was not me, it was Remy!

I am sorry I lied about many things. But I don't understand why you were mad at me when you find out that I lied about Remy breaking the window? I thought you liked lies. Otherwise, why did you tell Marty he is beautiful when he was crying because we called him a pig? Pig is cute, Marty is cute, but neither of them is beautiful. By the way, Remy started it. Remy called Marty a pig first.

All in all, I hope you can forgive me for all my bad behavior. I wish we could be friends again, although you hate kids, I will be twelve next week, so I think you will not hate me by then. I hope you will not make me write another letter this time because I have revised everything you were mad about this time. I will give you my stone as a gift of apology, and in return, I suppose you should return my comic book which I read in your class, because it is a mature behavior to exchange gifts.

Please don't make me write another letter of apology this time.

Last but not least: I am sorry, Mrs. Fletcher.

Sincerely,

Rodrick Muller

MIGRANTS

By Savanna Lai.

They say a tiny ant can hold up to ten times its weight.

Any other ant facts are as follows:

a nuisance

disgusting

unwelcome

From outside my house, a river of ants flows into my kitchen, escaping the unforgiving summer heat. They surge in wave after wave and seek refuge, tiny feet slapping the cold kitchen tiles. The moving river flows into a small crack, a dismal hole in the wall, a temporary place to live. It is enough for them. My mother leans on all fours and gently wipes them with a damp cloth soaked in vinegar – a technique to provide new directions, but never aimed to kill. She guides them to a new location under the loquat tree where they will have shade and the sticky sweet fruit sap that drips down the tree trunks.

What she says is as follows:

how hard is it to live

to be hated instantly

how tired they must be

crossing borders

tiny ants

tiny bodies

strong ants

keep moving

you must know

your worth



DEAR FELLOW PRISONERS

By Liting Weng

My dear fellow prisoners,

If you want to get out of here, please listen to me very carefully. Follow these words of mine, because there is no other way out. If you don't want to leave, well, read on anyways. After all, you've got nothing to lose, not really. Nothing means anything anymore. Stay awake for a few minutes longer in this cycle and you'd get back the time you've spent on hearing me out. Sweet deal, isn't it? It is not, actually. Not by any standard. I feel pieces of my soul turn into dust as each day cycle goes by.

If you are ~~clueless~~ clueless about what I wrote so far, I am sorry. Ignorance is, in this case, indeed bliss and I am about to bring you into hell with me. I am bringing you with me because burning ourselves is the only source of light in this DAMNED place. We have to embrace the suffering because it is the only way out. Before we start, find yourself a mirror and look into your own eyes. You will not see the light of faith in it for a long time. Maybe not ever again. Because we are stuck in HELL. A world that is forgotten by the world.

Let's begin with a short introduction. There is no sugarcoating this.

Have you seen movies with time loops in them? Where the protagonists repeat a specific period of their lives until they break the cycle? If you have, that's good, because you should be able to catch up soon enough. I believe that we are, essentially, in a time loop. If you haven't, tough luck. You've got to figure this out quickly because this day might end soon and this piece of paper might not be produced in the new cycle.

I have made it my mission to make copies of this document whenever I wake up. I bring it to people and beg them to read it. It is perhaps why you are reading this in the first place. Unfortunately, I don't always get to preserve a copy with me when I die. You know, when the day ends and restarts. If it's a crash or stabbing, I can still make out the content underneath the dirt and blood, but if I die from a fire or explosion, I would lose the draft and have to rewrite it in the next cycle. Writing takes time, or at least it takes whatever the equivalence of time is in this world. I have memorized most of the words but sometimes I couldn't help but writing down my thoughts as I go. I am doing that exact thing now.

You will also have to excuse me for writing in this choose-your-own-adventure style. The truth is, I have no idea who is reading this. Things are getting out of control and we need to end this SOON. We have to. There is no time. This is why I have to address everyone even without a clear grasp of where each one of you is in the process of waking up. It is easy to tell who are woke and who are not. Remember the light you saw in your eyes when we started? That's the sign of people who are ASLEEP. And now, look yourself in the eye again. See the dimness and uncertainty? THOSE are the sign of awaken-ness.

Writing guidelines like this is the best I can do. And, although I say choose-your-own-adventure, that is not true. In this world, there cannot be MY adventure, YOUR adventure, HERE adventure and his adventure, because all is one. In this world that resets itself after our deaths, we share ONE adventure. The countless pathways that we walk down every time we open our eyes entwine into the one powerful, invincible strand that holds us here. That holds us DOWN.

It has to be everyone. Perhaps, if we are fortunate enough, this can be a collective

nightmare. We would be able to just WAKE UP from it and everything will be back to normal how they used to be. If you have watched any film about time loops, most of the time, the protagonists escape when they discover some deep secrets about themselves or the meaning of life. What they didn't explain is, whose truth, whose life? WHOSE? I no longer have any idea about whose and which truth we have to uncover to escape. I have laid myself bare to my very soul and nothing happened. I have yelled all my darkest secrets out of my chest in the early days and not even the clouds in the sky changed their shape. My past has no more stone to turn and I am afraid.

I am terrified, if I am completely honest and I have no reason not to be honest. I have nothing to lose that will not come back to me the next day.

This place changes you. Your grasp of reality slowly slips away. Clinging onto the truth feels like holding sand and seawater in your palm through your fingers. I wanted to smell the salty air of the seashore desperately. There is no sea in this damned place. There is only calmness that is so CALM that makes me anxious instead. Truth and reality do not disappear, but they cannot be harnessed either. They disappear into thin air but leave traces on your skin that tease you and toy with the last thread of reason that you have. There is nothing but cruelty left in here.

You have to trust me. Think about the déjà vu moments that haunt you. Think about the person that you've just said "nice to meet you" to but looks terrifyingly familiar. Think about the world outside and think about the things that you don't know. Think about everything, please, even those you do not dare thinking about. Look into the corners that you do not want to go to in your mind. I am begging you. Do you not wonder what happens to the world when we are unaware? Do you not fear that the world is passing us by? Do you not feel yourself disappearing?

Do you not believe me? Still? Even after all the elaboration? How about this: Look up. Are you at the gate of the campus at three thirty now? A few seconds from now, the bell nearby will strike, not loudly enough to startle you, but plenty for the pigeons. On the patches of grass on the right, the one that is narrower and somehow greener, three clusters of pigeons will descend again. The number of birds in each group is three, seventeen, and thirteen. Walk forward and stomp your right foot. The pigeon with a stone-grey body and two rows of blue-black feathers will flinch.

That is something, isn't it? There is something about time that people believe in. The absoluteness of it. The infallibility of it. Whoever holds some power to escape the chains of time, earns some sort of credibility. I do not have the power to escape time, but well now I am discrediting myself aren't I? please believe me anyway. I don't know better, but I have seen worse.

Trust me, please. I need you to wake up from this.
I am terrified.
I cannot carry on any longer.
Please.

(Sign here) _____

COUNTING TIDES

"Shall I dive straight down
to the ocean floor and
confront the final call?"

By Deborah Lin

Just how unreal we all would feel
counting tides that engulfed the shore;
meekly-tamed, but they'd conceal
of hearts alike, all keen to pour
out a stream of notion
of ivory dreams
in the foamy ocean
where corals agleam...

Taste the taste
of this rosy glaze
It's rather sweet
but soon replaced
by the deep-dark torrents of conceit
with the waves hauling at my feet...

Shall I dive
straight down to the ocean floor
and confront the final call?

Or swim on—
linger in the water shallow
to rinse my restless soul?



THE NANNY

By Savanna Lai

Seven

Outside the rain pounds against the pavement but softly pitter-patters against the car roof. Your finger traces one of the many raindrops that glide across the car window. It travels diagonally - consuming droplets in its path, leaving behind a straight trail.

They hired a nanny that year. Your shyness prevents you from looking them in the eye, but you feel their presence from time to time. They tell you they've actually been with your family for a while now. You still don't understand why you need a nanny. You've always been a

Good kid. Quiet in class. Promising student.

You don't understand why they're there. Bad kids have nannies. Kids whose parents aren't around need nannies. Example: Nanny McPhee. Example: Mary Poppins. They make you feel like a bad kid. You did nothing wrong. Your parents are there. There's nothing wrong. You're not a bad kid. You're not.

The tip of your finger is cold. Night time chills the window. Like the raindrop you trace, your finger leaves a dry trail along the foggy window. A straight line. Maybe four curves for a butterfly. The right antenna looks wonky. Warm breath against the glass. You start over. A sun. In the corner. Zigzags. Grass.

You can never have fun whenever they're around. You just wanted to play with the other kids. But they're there when you realize you left your lunchbox at school. You try to hide it but they know. They always know. You cry when your mama confronts you. It's stupid. You can bring it home tomorrow. But you cry. They remind your mama how other kids remember their lunchboxes. Not you. Tattler.

They let your father know you're drawing figures on the glass. His voice breaks the silence and it scares you. He tells you you're blocking his view. Wipe it away, he says. Your lips quiver, but you use your white long sleeve to clear the glass.

Your mother hates it whenever you wear white. Despises it. She makes you wear a jacket over your white shirt even when it's hot outside. You can't help it. It's a school uniform. White is bad, she zips up your jacket.

Tonight all of you are wearing white.

They've always been with your family. The nanny. They're a part of you. They'll never go away. It doesn't seem like it.

The glass is clear. Pictures erased.

Seems a bit shy. Gets along well with others. Bright student.

You're a good kid, you tell yourself. Good kid.

Eleven

You don't understand why everybody has to listen to the nanny, but you're too afraid to ask.

The nanny suggests an organic diet, how it can help you become healthier. Maybe it will bring some balance to your lives – a group effort of sorts. The other families are doing it. The other families do things together. Why aren't you? Why don't you?

It's enough to convince your mama to go on a health craze for a month, swapping white rice for the brown rice that's always too dry and the Flintstone Vitamins for whatever the protein shake people outside Whole Foods managed to sell her. You miss the way the trapped steam erupts from the rice cooker when you lift the lid. How you could never quite close the pork floss lid right on the first try. The sweet oval rice crackers in the small yellow plastic packages. Sweet yellow powder coating the crunchy white shell. Licking it off before taking a bite. Now everything you eat tastes cold. Dry. Bland. Still, you don't complain.

A few weeks later, the two of you are now sitting in the backseat of her Nissan, struggling to take off the plastic lid on the mini lemon bites your mother suggested on the way to the Costco checkout line. She remembers how much you liked them the last time they bought a

case.

You know exactly where they are located. Bakery section. Next to the red Hawaiian Bread bags. You make it back before she starts putting the items on the conveyor belt.

The lid pops off and the two of you grin at each other with childlike stupor. The lemon bites' saccharine scent fills the car. Like peeling the skin off a ripe clementine, starting from the underside where there's a pocket of air, the two of you peel off the yellow icing in one piece and plop it straight into your mouths. The smooth icing feels like forgiveness on your rough tongue. Your mama pops the entire cake into her mouth to chase the sweetness. You do the same.

You almost forget they're there. They're staring at the two of you, probably angry you're indulging in yourself. You're on your second cake now. The third. You're too scared to look them in the eye. You chew slowly.

While you aren't looking, they lean over the front seat and whisper to your mother. Your mother's expression hollows and she leans over to wipe off the crumbs on the corner of your lips. Your father is coming home late again, she tells you.

The three of you drive home in silence. There's an uneasiness in your stomach. The lemon bites don't taste as sweet anymore.

Fifteen

You're embarrassed you're being punished at this age.

The nanny stands over the two of you while your mother cries as she repeatedly brings her rough palm to the back of your hand she's holding. Your tears roll down your cheeks like raindrops on the car window. The nanny consoles your mother, reminding her how she's better than the other mothers. *They* used bamboo sticks, hangers if the sticks broke, she doesn't. When you stand up, your knees ache.

This sucks, you think to yourself. Your eyes are going to be puffy.

At night, your mother enters your room and grabs your empty dinner bowl, replacing it with a bowl of green grapes in the sundae bowl you saved up from years ago at your local Chuck E. Cheese. Each grape is meticulously peeled and halved so only the sweet and juicy stiff flesh remains. They glisten under your table lamp as a form of apology for the earlier event. She exits your room without a word. The door closes with a *click* and you are alone.

You're annoyed the nanny is still here. You're old enough to know that you don't need a nanny. You don't need a caretaker. The nanny doesn't even do anything. The nanny doesn't even take care of you. Your parents also don't openly speak to the nanny.

You tried asking your mother about the nanny. Tried. You were tired. Your mother didn't want to hear any of it. She didn't care about your concerns - at least that's what you gathered. None of it made any sense. None of this makes any sense. And then she starts ranting about anything that you didn't do, that you couldn't do to deter from your question.

Question. Knees on the floor. Hands out. Sharp pain. Room. Studying. Grapes. Question. Loop.

This happens every single time. You don't understand. Why the nanny? Why listen to the nanny?

This happens every single time. You don't understand. Why the nanny? Why listen to the nanny?

Tonight you sleep with the light on. An act of defiance without anybody knowing. You don't sleep. You can't sleep. Not when there's arguing coming from the other room. An act of defiance. That's what it is. You're not concerned. No, not concerned. Father is home late again. Other children's fathers don't come home late, your mother says. Where did she get this information from? You never saw her with friends. Should you be concerned whether or not she has friends? No, probably not. The nanny keeps telling them to compare you and whatever you do to people in different countries, people of past generations, and whatever they could find on the news.

You can't sleep. Not when there are thoughts in your head. Should you turn the lights off? No. Don't turn the lights off. Sleep with the lights on. If they say you're a bad kid, then you're a bad kid.

Fuck it.

Eighteen

You thank Rina's nanny when she passes you the popped microwavable popcorn bag. When she leaves, Rina appears from the wine cellar with a bottle behind her back

Your eyes widen and you shake your head at her, letting her know that it was a bad idea. She grins, hopping on the reclining theater seat next to yours. The movie is paused and a loup *pop* echoes throughout Rina's home theater. There is a cork opener in her pocket. You hug the bag of popcorn closer to you as Rina takes a swig from the bottle. Years later the two of you will laugh at the stupidity of taking swigs from hundred dollar wine bottles, but for now, it is the coolest, most badass thing you've seen Rina do. She passes you the bottle.

You glance at her and she shrugs. We're fine, she reassures you. Her mother is in another room and the nanny won't come down to bother you. The nanny always uses the intercom to tell you when dinner is ready.

Must be nice, you think.

The wine is nasty, but you continue taking small sips from the bottle. You don't understand why people would drink wine and come to the conclusion that it would taste great when paired with dinner. It's gross and bitter. It's nothing like the green grapes...

You hear crying from the other room and you ask Rina if her mother is okay. Rina's face is red, but she's fine. It's normal. Happens a lot.

You or your mother?

My mother, Rina says. She usually sips Merlot on the balcony or by the pool while tapping away on her tablet with her manicured fingers. A cup for work and the rest of the bottle for her dramas. Feels a bit weird calling her my mother when she does nothing. I think she's in her room today talking to her secretary or something.

You ask her about her occupation and she laughs. She's on the PTA board and she doesn't even care about my school or me. She likes doing it because it makes her seem important and capable. The truth is, I can't remember the last time she took care of me. It also doesn't explain why she would need to hire an online secretary.

explain why she would need to hire an online secretary.

If it makes you feel better, my nanny doesn't do anything, you grumble. My parents do everything.

I love you and you're my best friend, she puts her hand on your shoulder, but you really have to stand up for yourself. Your nanny has been with you for years and you *still* haven't talked to them? Not even once? We've been over this before. What are you so scared of? I'm on my eighth nanny because a majority of them kept on stealing things from us whenever we were out on vacations. Your nanny literally does nothing and that's good.

You frown and pass the bottle back to her. You stare into the popcorn bag and pick at the kernels at the bottom of the bag.

Why don't we just switch places like how they do in the movies, she reaches into your popcorn bag grabbing a handful. Maybe I'll finally find out what it feels like to have parents who sleep in the same room. Don't tell anyone this, she leans back into the recliner and hugs the bottle to her chest. My dad has another family abroad but my parents care too much about their image to get a divorce. So he buys us nice things and pays for everything. Ha! She laughs out loud. Can you imagine us as parents? What a shitty thing to be. I'll feel bad for my children. They won't have grandparents who bake cookies and send them hand-knitted sweaters during the holidays.

Parents, it echoes in your head. What a shitty thing indeed.

Present

Like windchimes, the white plastic blinds softly clap against each other when a gentle breeze blows into your bedroom. Outside crickets are chirping, and you can hear the faintest car honking in the distance.

You can't sleep.

It's been months since you last visited home. Maybe you weren't supposed to see them. But you saw them, a glimpse. The glimpse was enough to scare you into leaving earlier than you would've liked. It was enough to keep your mind full for days...even now.

They had the same face. You've seen it before in the past when flipping through old family albums. You've seen it before when you were younger. You've seen it at their house. They looked so strange, yet so familiar.

They say humans are doomed to make the same mistake. Those who don't even know they made a mistake repeat it sometime in the future.

"My mom spoon-fed me wine if I was too hyper at night. She claimed it was the same thing Mary Poppins gave the children in that one scene," Rina, much older now, brings her open compact up to her right eye and stares into it, fluffing her lash extension with her acrylic nail. "Sometimes I wonder if I would ever turn out just like her."

"I've been to your house so many times and I swear I've only seen her once," you lean forward and squint at your dim phone screen under the bright sunlight. You can barely see how the brunch spread looks through the screen. "I think you take after your nannies, and that's a compliment."

Rina snaps her compact shut and sighs, tossing it in her bag. She points at the flute in front of her, "These mimosas are bottomless, right?"

The bed feels empty, and you feel bad because you're sleeping in different rooms. You stand by your argument: you don't know if you want kids, so that's why you don't want kids. It never occurred to you that you would have this conversation in the future, so you never prepared for it.

Just like how you can never prepare for their presence. They're here. Uninvited. As usual. The door never opened, but they're in your bedroom. You hear the bed squeak the way it does whenever you climb onto the bed, but the bed doesn't dip. You don't turn around. You stare at the blinds illuminated by the moonlight. There's no movement in the room except for the blinds.

"I don't know who you are," you mumble. You know the nanny won't talk to you, at least not for now. You're braver now. Much older. "But if I'm selfish, you'll end up taking care of my kids. And I don't want that."

Silence.

"It's not like I would be a bad parent," you're talking to your ceiling. "But no matter how many parenting books I read or parenting classes I take, I know you're going to be there."

"I looked at my nanny," you were tired of mixing the mimosas yourself so you ditched the orange juice a while back.

"Jesus," Rina takes the unfinished glass from your hand and swaps it with a glass of water. "Are you okay?"

"You're not going to ask me about their appearance?" You frown when she motions for you to drink the water.

"The same reason why you never asked about my mom's secretary."

Rina never talked about her mother's secretary like how you never knew much about your own nanny. The two of you thought it was normal when you were younger - Rina's secretary made a lot more sense given her father's occupation. While you were fixated on your nanny, Rina accepted the fact that she was never going to meet the secretary and left it as it was.

Maybe you should be more like Rina.

It was weird. It, or the nanny, looked like an amalgamation of people you once knew. Even with that brief moment you saw them, it was like your mind continued to play tricks on your memory. You saw fragments. It was as if Frankenstein's creature has been birthed from fragments of people's past. Every time you tried to remember the nanny's face, you saw a different person. Most often it was people you've seen over the years, sometimes it would be an unfamiliar face. Yet you felt like you knew the unfamiliar face, like putting a face to a person your best friend had been gushing about for the past few weeks.

"Won't you go away?" you asked your nanny while you let your eyes wander from the ceiling to the windows to the little mirror on your bedside drawer.

Little fragments of moonlight illuminated the mirror enough for you to make out the faintest

reflection. You can see yourself in bed, nothing else.

"No," you replied. "I'm a part of you."

There is no other person in the room. Your reflection speaks to you again.

"I've always been a part of you."

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH



Taipei Literature Festival: Healing
Location: Bopiliao Historic Block
3/26 (Sat.) – 4/24 (Sun.)



Treasure Hill Light Festival 2022
Location: Treasure Hill
3/26 (Sat.) – 5/8 (Sun)

APRIL



Leading-Edge Lecture 31
Remediating the Future:
Metahistorical Reflections on the
Avant-Garde
@College of Liberal Arts, NTU
(with Live Stream)
4/27 (Wed.) 10:00–12:00



MOST Research Project
Presentations:
Cultural Studies/American
Literatures
Online Event
4/8 (Fri.) 13:00–16:40



2022 Golden Horse Fantastic Film
Festival
4/8 (Fri.) – 4/17 (Sun.)

MAY



MOST Research Project
Presentations:
English Literatures
Online Event
5/6 (Fri.) 13:00–16:40



MOST Research Project Presentation:
Race and Gender, Literary theory
Online Event
5/27 (Fri.) 13:00–16:40

JUNE



CLAROC Annual Conference
Speed Shambles
@National Taiwan Normal University
6/15 (Wed.)



ACLA Annual Meeting 2022
@ National Taiwan Normal
University
6/15 (Wed.) – 6/18 (Sat.)

Project + March 2022
Issue 18

發行人 | 李欣穎所長

Issuer | Dr. Hsin-ying Li

責任顧問 | 賴煦教授、于昌民教授

Advisor | Dr. Alexander Paulsson Lash, Dr. Chang-Min Yu

責任編輯 | 翟欣瑜、賴美嫻、翁儷庭

Editors | Jenny Chai, Savanna Lai, Liting Weng

美術設計 | 賴美嫻

Visual Design | Savanna Lai