“Who am I when I am not around other people, displacing those relationships that reinforce who I am to the world?”
Dene Dryden, pg. 13

“You taught me to be Thing. Ball and cube. Coat rack and table. Without your hand, I didn’t know a purpose. You taught me to be Thing.”
Nay Joshua, pg. 19
Live Ideas: Undergraduate Primary Texts Journal

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—Jakob Hanschu & Laurie Johnson, February 2019
Author Spotlight:

Suan Sonna

Conducted, Transcribed, & Edited by

Jakob Hanschu
senior | anthropology & geography

Suan Sonna

Jakob Hanschu met with Suan Sonna to discuss Suan’s background, philosophy, and previous contribution to Live Ideas. Below is an edited transcript of their conversation.

JH: I’m here with Suan Sonna, who is the author of the short story “Mishima in Love,” which appeared in our first edition back in February. I’ll let Suan start by just telling us a little bit about himself.

SS: Right, so I’m a freshman majoring in philosophy and minoring in political science. I went to high school in Kansas City, Kansas—I basically lived there all my life—but I was originally born in northeastern India in a place called Manipur in a town called Lamka… so just out in the middle of nowhere basically, around Burma and China.

JH: Is that in the mountains?
SS: It’s very close.

JH: Ah, here I am, a geography major who doesn’t know where things are.
SS: No, don’t worry about it. Most people don’t know that my people, my tribe—the Zomi tribe—they don’t know that they exist.

JH: Oh wow! That’s interesting to me as both a geographer and an anthropologist… So India? And then straight to Kansas City?
SS: Yeah, basically.

JH: For parents’ jobs?
SS: Yeah, so in 2000, my dad left to get his education at the Central Baptist Theological seminary in Kansas. And, then, he thought he would finish his studies and go back, but then I think he was still young and realized that he just had a family, so he didn’t want to leave us. So, in 2001 we joined him, and from there we’ve just been with him since. We became citizens in 2016.

JH: That’s amazing. So now we will move into your piece a little bit. “Mishima in Love” draws on the work of Yukio Mishima, right, this Japanese… and, I don’t know, he probably wouldn’t like us labeling him… this Japanese author, creator, activist type figure. So how did you come across Mishima and what is your personal take on him, aside from what we get in your piece?

SS: I first encountered Mishima when I was in high school during my junior year. Our English teacher wanted us to read multicultural texts, so he found The Sound of Waves by Yukio Mishima, and we were all researching him, and my classmates were all laughing and snickering because they were like “Oh, so he’s this super masculine guy, but he’s also gay?” And somehow my classmates thought that that was a contradiction in terms, and I was like “Ok, this is really fascinating”—like all these attitudes that are coming out. Then, as I looked into Mishima and his life and read his biography, I saw that he committed ritual suicide, an Ichigaya… there was a whole military display and a ritual suicide, and I realized that this guy is serious. As I read more into him, I saw that he had a lot to say about Asian masculinity, political theory, and social thought, and I realized that Mishima was somebody who could be not only rationally assessed, but who also made a strong impact on me, as myself an Asian-American person. So, from there, my impression of Mishima is that he is too radical in some areas. I think he really did suffer a lot in his life from this huge pressure that he put on himself. He was so highly critical of his body, of his mind and his writing abilities, but I think that there’s something beautiful in that brokenness, and that’s what I tried to convey in “Mishima in Love.”

JH: Yes, and I think that you did an excellent job. I really liked the piece. So, you mention that you think Mishima is a bit too radical in some aspects, and also that he gets at social and political theory in his works… so where is he too radical? And is the radicalness tied up with his social and political thought? I’d assume so, but if you could just elaborate on that…

SS: I think that one of the problems is that Mishima was very big on death and bloodshed. We can understand why, because he viewed it as part of this whole view of aesthetics and beauty. But it comes to the point where some scholars have accused him of being nihilistic. On the one hand praising the ideals of Japan, praising tradition, and on the other hand he just dumped it. So, it seems as if Mishima lacked a consistent philosophy, but then again he didn’t mind that, because his impression of it all was
that “I’m trying to make a statement about true human nature, about how there’s this duality, this contradiction, so I don’t need to be fully rational all the time.” For me, as somebody who tends to like rationality and order, I’m not really buying into this whole idea. I’d say he goes a little extreme on death. He becomes too fanatical to the point of disregarding other institutions that I think are important. For example, in his own personal life… to commit suicide for a political cause in some ways seems as if he disregarded his children and his family, because he did have a family. It’s like… overall, I think he tries to present a very patriarchal, dominant sense of masculinity and it’s to the point where it’s almost frightening, but I think he would like you to be frightened by him. So, in a lot of ways, I think he’s just putting his desires in the wrong place.

**JH:** So that dominant sense of masculinity would seem to contrast with his love for art and writing and his work as a playwright… Anyways, you said that you got into Mishima’s texts in high school, but when did you actually write this piece?

**SS:** I wrote it probably some time around the middle of Winter break.

**JH:** The ideas stayed with you from high school then? You just put them on paper?

**SS:** Oh yeah, the ideas have been there for quite a long time. Well, I mean a long time in terms of my life, right.

**JH:** Right.

**SS:** But I’d been thinking that I really wanted to give a tribute Mishima, so how can I create a great tribute and show his work to other people. So I thought “Hey, what if we had a Westerner’s perspective engage Mishima?” So, that’s where the whole idea sprouted.

**JH:** Well I think if your goal was to bring Mishima to a new audience, then you definitely accomplished that. Now I want to dig a bit more into what you do and study. Stepping back from just this specific Mishima piece, what is the value in doing philosophy? Or if we wanted to take an even larger leap back, what’s the value of a liberal arts education?

**SS:** People often say that, you know, “I could live a perfectly happy and good life if I never really thought critically about things.” I think that’s a total lie, and I think it’s a lie because the world demands complexity. The world demands that you think and reason through things. So let’s say you have a paycheck, right, and then you have to decide how to spend that money—you’re dealing with economics automatically. Then when you’re thinking about your competing interests… you have to think about what you’re going to do. Let’s say there’s a homeless person on the side of the street. Well, you have to decide what to do. This idea that you could divorce yourself from rational thought and live is just… I think it’s a fallacy. It’s something that, when we look at Western philosophy, for example, especially now, we’ve developed this kind of radical individualism where people think they exist in an oasis away from cause-and-effect. This is untrue, and as long as you do exist in a cause-and-effect structure, you’re going to have to think about what your deeper beliefs are going to be. Like, what is the nature of goodness, what is worth pursuing in life…

**JH:** I can see where you’re coming from.

**SS:** When people say that they could just couch back and not think about these things, it’s like “Yeah, if you were a cat, if you were a dog perhaps,” but you are not just an animal. As Aristotle taught, you are a rational animal. You cannot really escape that aspect and live a good life. ~
Mawi Sonna met with Rachel Hermes to discuss art, the "artistic process," and Rachel's etching "Overcome," which was published in the previous edition of Live Ideas. Below is an edited transcript of their interview.

**Mawi:** Before we get started, could you introduce yourself?

**Rachel:** I'm Rachel Hermes, a senior in Fine Arts with dual concentrations in Painting and Printmaking.

**Mawi:** What is an etching and how is it made?

**Rachel:** An etching is a form of Fine Art Printmaking, which involves a metal copper plate coated with a wax-based resist. An artist scrapes through the resist to form an image and then submerges it in acid. The exposed copper gets carved and the acid creates grooves in the plate. The plate will then be able to hold ink, which will then be pushed through a printing press where the image can be transferred onto paper.

**Mawi:** What was the thought process behind the creation of "Overcome"?

**Rachel:** With this piece it was straightforward. The emotion behind it was the feeling of something overbearing and coming over me that just needed to come out. Initially, I started this etching the same time I started the painting. The etching was a lot faster, and both ended up being quite different. Rather than transferring the image using a projector, I measured my body free-hand for the painting.
**MS:** We often hear about “the artistic process”. What does that mean to you?

**RH:** To me, the artistic process is everything from the initial idea to final result. It varies from piece to piece, and sometimes is more difficult depending on what the end result is. It can involve a lot of reworking and sketching. With an etching it’s incremental, systematic, and technical. I can ask questions like ‘how long does the plate need to be in the acid bath’ or how much resistant to use’, without necessarily having to make big changes. With painting, there is more pressure because there is more investment monetarily and with time.

**MS:** Could you describe your relationship with painting and printmaking? Is there more compromise with one over the other?

**RH:** With etching there is less control because there are things that happen when the copper reacts with the acid, such as foul bite. However, it’s one of those things you kind of expect and understand because it is part of the process. With painting there is more control with the brush. Even though you don’t have to try to print it, it involves more of a process because other factors need to be considered. Such as the layers that need to be built up and what colors go where, or what types of white paint will produce the desired effect.

**MS:** What kind of questions do you ask yourself, whether with ‘Overcome’ or other pieces you create?

**RH:** Some questions are ‘what effect do I want it to have on the audience?’ With ‘Overcome’ I decided that I wanted to draw the viewer in, to stand and look, and feel overwhelmed. Other example of a question I ask myself is, ‘how much time do I really want to spend painting blades of grass?’

“**‘OVERCOME’ IS A VERY PERSONAL PIECE FOR ME, IN A SENSE IT WAS SOMETHING I HAD CREATED FOR MYSELF.”**

**MS:** Why did you think your piece was a good fit for Live Ideas?

**RH:** Live Ideas seems to be aiming to showcase original and authentic works by undergraduate students. ‘Overcome’ is a very personal piece for me, in a sense it was something I had created for myself. I had submitted my etchings to other places before, but my paintings were usually favored over them. In a sense, it made a difference because it made me think about my work in words; something written that I don’t do often enough. ~
How to Work From Home

Dene Dryden
senior | english

In a personal essay, the author explores the positives and negatives of working from home and the motivational struggles of self-fulfillment and self-motivation. She contemplates how working from home has become a cultural phenomenon and how her future career can and cannot fit into that mold.

Keywords: work, fulfillment, motivation

It’s dark in here. Let’s open up the blinds.

The sunlight reminds me that (when it gets much warmer) I can go outside and take a walk, let my hair air-dry, bike without fear of sliding on ice. It’s the dead of winter, January. A new start, but an awfully cold one. To me, the sun and its heat are happy things. In the middle of my hibernation, the sunlight also reminds me that I am in fact an actual person with responsibilities and identity.

The winter break between semesters is a true break — after some tumultuous holiday travel, I have almost a month of unabashed free time. No class. New job doesn’t start until January 14th. I have goals that I can accomplish (read five books!) but can slack off on with no repercussions (read 0.8 books). But without the usual structure of classes, work, required reading and writing, yoga classes, and conveniently seeing friends in those activities, it’s easy to drift. I’m easily cabin-fevered.

Self-motivation, for me, comes with some terms and conditions. First, you’ve got to have set deadlines — no, not ones you set. They must be set by other people, who rely on you to accomplish those tasks. Second, there tasks that you don’t have to do, but you should at some point — and the urge to work on a job application or next fall’s schedule can’t be planned; it must be spontaneous. Also, there’s no way you’re getting up at 9 a.m. on a Saturday to get your work “out of the way.” You require either sunlight or that second wind of motivation that hits like caffeine at about 11:45 p.m. Or 12:31. Depends on the moon.

The last caveat: don’t you dare think you’re accomplishing anything at home. This is what coffee shops and libraries are made for, stupid. (Except when the seats are full or the building is closed—this is the fine print).

“Writing is flexible; you can do it anytime, anywhere with a pencil or free WiFi.”

These habits scare me when I think about my career as a nonfiction writer and journalist. Writing is flexible; you can do it anytime, anywhere with a pencil or free WiFi. So, naturally, freelance writing and reporting careers have become more common. They’re backup options if you can’t land a steady job. Do some copywriting here, a feature story there, maybe create some corporate promotional materials that shine with synergy and growth mindset tactics. Work from home.

Work from home?
Over my dead body.

My desk at work is in a corner. Corkboard stretches above my head adorned with birthday cards, sticky notes, a braided strand of yarn, a ticket stub, a sprig of sage. I have all the distractions I need there to excuse myself from working: coworkers who shout ear-perking jokes, unlimited queries from the depths of Google, a computer streaming trap music that evokes a flashback to an unpleasant fall at a nightclub — sticky floor memories are undoubtedly distracting. But on a good day, while the newsroom is moderately quiet, I’ll
melt into my computer screen, writing with devout concentration.

My desk at home is also in a corner.

“When are you going to clean off your desk?” my partner asks. I sat at his desk to write because my laptop tragically passed the rainbow bridge at the ripe age of 13 months. Quitter. While I waited for my next computer to arrive, I used my partner’s desktop for all my computer-y needs.

“I mean, I know you need to use my computer now, but didn’t you say you were going to clean off your desk over break?”

“HOLD IN THE WORLD CAN YOU MANAGE RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN THE ONLY PERSON HOLDING YOU ACCOUNTABLE IS THE DOG, AND SHE ONLY REMINDS YOU OF YOUR DUTIES WHEN SHE NEEDS TO PEE?”

I did say that. But I’ve been known to lie to myself. On multiple occasions I promised to cut back on sugar, to take fifteen minutes a day to read for leisure, to wash the sheets more often. My loyalty is a gift only to everyone else. Meanwhile, my desk is the catch-all flat surface for documents, mementos, and gloves. A set of helpful tools are lined up where the wood meets the wall, like my stapler and pencil cup. But then there are the cat’s veterinary records, class notes from last semester, a red gift bag I intend on reusing. If I were to clean this mess, the first step would be to find the desk itself again, buried under the ephemera.

“I’ll do it tomorrow,” I’d say. “I’ve done a lot today.”

The idea of primarily working at home, enclosed in the same space all day, grinds at me in a way I don’t fully understand. But I do know that the key to working at home is to have a designated workspace. A home office barricaded by mild blue walls, a window with a view so still it might as well be a painting. A door to let ambient noises in or keep the rollicking dogs out. Ideally the desk would have a large wingspan to accompany my auxiliary items, with the laptop front and center. Roomy shelves for trinkets and books. Drawers for papers and shit to forget about, opened again when it’s time to declutter. A chair that accommodates my various yogic sitting experiences. A space separate from the home with the comforts of home.

I think about the freelancers writing their days away, creating entire novels in their heads, cultivating a fresh design for a webpage they pocketed sixty dollars to fix. I think about the ones who live alone — the only witnesses to their internet-connected madness could be a pair of cats or some spangled snakes. How in the world can you manage responsibilities when the only person holding you accountable is the dog, and she only reminds you of your duties when she needs to pee?

Perhaps the physical space doesn’t matter much to other people. Maybe people who work from home are the same people who can fall asleep in a car anytime, anywhere, any position. The secret has to be self-motivation. Self-discipline. Self-organization.

“A sense of self.

Denying that you have a problem is worse than the actual problem. A boiling-hot infection causes pain but denying its existence results in destruction. My excuses are myriad: Over break I don’t have deadlines. I can do it tomorrow. I’ll have time later. It’s cold out so I won’t go. I won’t work from home but leaving takes effort.

With every passing January day, I forgot who I was. Sure, I interacted with other human beings: I live with my partner, and I met up with friends as often as our off-work schedules aligned. But it’s so easy to forget: I’m a daughter. I’m a student. I’m an editor. I’m a rewards cardholder at my local grocery store. Who am I when I am not around other people, displacing those relationships that reinforce who I am to the world?

My isolated days can turn dark. Without those social roles and relationships shaping my actions, structure and schedule are cast wayside, but judgement remains. When I forgot washing my face, I have no one to blame but myself when my forehead is pockmarked with redness — negligent craters. When I realize
touching my phone to do anything else feels like treason. My laundry list and the laundry itself pile up. My chance for solitude, relaxation, and unbounded productivity is engulfed by my anxious anticipation for the future. The dark side of the moon is witnessed by no one but itself.

“You set your boundaries. You set your space. ...Customization is what sells the home-work life.”

Surely there must be some benefits to working from home, some that are hard for me to see. For starters, working from home means you make your own rules. Time is an illusion. Business casual is a sham. Your eight-hour workday can start at 9 o’clock, noon, or later. Instead of annoying cubicle neighbors, your coworkers could be your lap cat, the beta fish, or a family of potted herbs munching on sunlight by that picturesque window (and maybe a spouse and kids, if you’re into that). When you want to be around others, the work can travel with you to the library, a coffee shop, or a park. And when you’re tired of faces, there’s a great workspace waiting at home. Lunch breaks might take four hours, or you might continue working during a bathroom break — something I assume is frowned upon in an office, but I’m no expert. You set your boundaries. You set your space. You can ensure that the “office” coffee pot is soaped and scrubbed at the end of each day. Customization is what sells the home-work life.

Another perk: When you successfully work from home, you know how much you can actually achieve.

About a year ago, a winter break before the last, I worked from home. I tasked myself with updating the **Collegian** student newspaper’s style guide, as it had not undergone a revision in eight years. As the publication’s copyeditor, I had run into many problems and inconsistencies while using that resource. So it was time for an upgrade. Sitting at my partner’s desk again, this time in a different house, I armed myself with caffeine and dollar store highlighters and plunged into deep revision. I adjusted for the discomforts, made my folded leg a support beam in that lopsided swivel chair. A piece of scratch paper littered with my mock cursive, each task struck through in its completion. I was my own project manager for something not at all necessary, but I slayed each devil in the details of the work: adding new entries, updating entries, rectifying typos, banishing outdated entries like pouring bad milk down the sink. Flipping pages dried my hands, but who cared? I was soaking up that energy of true motivation.

“Perhaps working from home seems too idealistic...”

My name. Spring 2018. The black-inked cover of the style guide was marked again. For me, the new contributor line on the cover marked a personal project achieved. I think it all took about twenty hours for over 200 pages of material containing at least thirty new entries. All from home — or, at least, a place familiar enough to me to consider a home.

I still have my motivation problem. Though the style guide is an example that shows I can set deadlines and goals for myself, the everyday grind begs to differ. Perhaps working from home seems too idealistic; it requires rigorous organization, dedication, and focus that comes only from the gut. Maybe it’s burnout culture — my millennial mind grows subconsciously tired of this system that begs me to take my work home after the school day proper, my couch becoming a vessel for rushed Latin study and leisurely Netflix viewings that carry a tinge of guilt because I’m not working hard enough. Or again, maybe it’s the moon.

As the blinds swivel open, sunlight bathes the dining table. The cat curves her back to the sky, yellow eyes adjusting to the muted sun. There’s a coffee cup on the counter from yesterday — the dried residue inside forms a crater. A negligent act. A byproduct of my self-critical mind. How to work from home isn’t only a dilemma of my professional sensibilities — it’s the first knot in a net that binds me. Life isn’t perfect (but it could be?). And it shouldn’t be (but could it?).

I start a new pot of coffee. Look out to the daylight. Swallow what I know to be true. What I should do. What I must do to retain that sense of self. Because the moon will come again. ~
SHOWER

THOUGHTS

Kelsey Hoines
senior | fine arts

Bright, swirling colors invite the eye into a space that reveals itself to be isolating and invasive to the vulnerable female figure. The viewer hovers over her as she covers herself, despite being alone in her environment. Dripping down her body is the colorful, happy mask she puts on for the outside world, which hides her inner conflict and deteriorating mental health. Her legs turn red from the endless stream of hot water as she leans against the shower wall, trapped in thought.

Keywords: oil paint, figurative, colorful, perspective, foreshortening
Playdough

Nay Joshua
junior | fine arts

A retrospective look on the effects of emotional abuse during childhood.

Keywords: Family, abuse, growth, maturity, self love

You taught me to be Thing.
Ball and cube. Coat rack and table.
Without your hand, I didn’t know a purpose.

You taught me to be Thing.
Brainless and void. Voiceless and obedient.
Without your guidance, I didn’t know capability.

You commanded my skin to be elastic.
“Hold my worry inwards,” you told me
And I never let you feel the strain.

You commanded my skin to be squishy.
“Cave to my whims,” you told me
And I never resisted your dreams for my life.

Then you got new toys that smelled crisp like lemon disinfectant.
Obviously, you grew tired of my soft lingering vanilla.
So you replaced me.

Then you left me on the floor to mix with crusting vomit stains.
Clearly, my soft sugar scent couldn’t cut through the pungent citrus.
So I wasn’t enough to get your attention back.

But eventually, I will find my packaging
Learn that tartar could become arms
And reach for flour and oil.

And eventually, I will find water and salt
Form long feet and walk away
Then cover my head in flour and dye

I will command my skin to be elastic.
“Let go of doubt” I’ll say
And you’ll never feel their weight again.

I will command my skin to be squishy.
“Create new aspirations” I’ll say
And you’ll never be lost again.

You taught me I am versatile.
I can become indestructible, hard like diamond.
I can become smooth, soft like feathers.
You taught me I am everything and nothing.
I can become hollow and absorb knowledge.
I can become anything and be better than you.
I wake up with blood in my mouth.
Cheeks gashed open from nervous midnight gnawing.
Ex-Stepfather, The Demon, had riddled my dreams with horror again.
But my skin is not hot with panic or sweat
It is flush red with rage and burning eyes.

The images still swirl like the blood in my mouth:
His dirty claws stretching towards Mother,
My feet stuck in a desert expanding by the second,
My muscles weighted down by useless armor,
And her contorted face is frozen in a pillar of salt—forever screaming.

This dream was like the blood in my mouth:
It was a denial of healing and a signal of a broken soul.
I wanted to be Mother’s David and slay her Goliath,
But distance rendered me and my anger useless.
My travels transformed me into the forgettable silt I stood in.

Her wounds were like the blood in my mouth:
A painful product of illusions that came from the subconscious.
In this reality and in the dream, I am her inadequate little boy
Playing pretend with knighthood and warriorocity.
Simply too weak to complete a rescue not meant for me.

Father smelled like the blood in my mouth:
Spoiled and unnatural, yet buried deep in the soil of my brain.
My muscles froze at the stench and my bones groaned in the sand.
So with my lips, I shaped curses into javelins;
Throwing them into his vast stench of desperation and drunkenness.

The words I said were like the blood in my mouth:
Nasty explicit things that rattled in my teeth.
Sadly, he was beyond my reach and long dead.
So I yelled at the desert covering my feet; wailing like Mary at the cemetery.
I refused to realize that tombstones make awful audiences.

I used to hold hope like the blood in my mouth:
I would long to hear Mother cry herself to sleep in relief
And to smell her cleansing prayers spread through the house like incense.
But Time weathered hope into used charcoal
Leaving questions burning deep under my skin.

Could hate stain like the blood in my mouth?
Will I ever be brave enough to face Mother after leaving her?
If forgiveness was not mine to give, then why was I still hurting?
Who was I without this trauma?
Was it selfish to want to hold on to it?

These questions pierced me like the sunrise in my window,
Highlighted embers that refused to die
And exposed a wound that is mine and not Mother’s.
The blood in my mouth was like the pain in my chest.
Who knew grudges were one-sided?

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NIGHTMARES

Nay Joshua
junior | fine arts

The regrets of being absent in family emergencies because of college commitment are explored in this piece. I walk through my own experience of dealing with the aftermath of the news.

Keywords: Family, abuse, growth, maturity, self love
Commodity Fetishism and Digital Pornography

Olivia Madderom

senior | communication studies & anthropology

Digital pornography is constantly at society’s fingertips. But what really goes on? Producing, distributing, and consuming pornography involves not just simple monetary exchanges but also complicated webs of human social relations that are often overlooked. Is pornography now objectifying sexual actions to the extent that consumers understand them only within the realm of the product?

Keywords: pornography, commodity fetishism, critical theory

In our everyday lives, digital pornography seems to be accepted by the masses as normal (but private) behavior that is rarely addressed in public spaces. I do not believe that many consumers of pornography have mindfully considered the effects of the production and exchange of digital pornography. In this essay, I aim to apply Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism to digital pornography. Simply put, commodity fetishism is the view that the production and exchange of a commodity involves only economic relationships between goods and money, when in reality commodities are composed of real social and human relations. Market exchanges carry not just relationships between things but relationships between people. This concept, when stretched, will turn our understanding of pornography on its head: what we think is a simple exchange of goods is actually a complicated exchange of relationships. A classic example of commodity fetishism is buying a box of cereal. When consumers purchase the cereal, they believe they are only partaking in a simple economic exchange and that only a relationship between things is happening. The box of cereal’s value is seen in and of itself. This view disregards the complex system of social relationships that were involved in the cereal’s production, and the consumer is left unaware that buying the cereal puts them into a web of human relationships. I will be taking this Marxian concept of commodity fetishism and applying it to digital pornography to analyze how it functions in a consumer-driven, digital society. Doing so will be extremely beneficial for understanding the effects of treating pornography like a commodity.

“Digital pornography is a vehicle that allows for sexual content to be (re)formatted in a way that can be clicked, bought, sold, and shared like any other online good or service.”

Commodity fetishism is important when thinking about pornography because there is tension in defining pornography as a relational exchange or as a material/monetary exchange. Using Marx, I argue that the exchange and production of pornography is commonly viewed as a material exchange when it is really a relational exchange. Digital pornography is a vehicle that allows for sexual content to be (re)formatted in a way that can be clicked, bought, sold, and shared like any other online good or service. An underlying theme of commodity fetishism is that the individual thinks that pornography (or the object of study) operates in a given way. Thus, most users assume digital pornography is a singular monetary exchange used as means to an end, and do not recognize its complex social involvement. Through knowledge of the multifaceted system that creates and assigns value to pornography, we can (hopefully) better understand its wide-reaching implications for our society.

To begin, Marx defines a commodity as, “an object outside us, a thing that by its
properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another” (Marx 1867). Pornography operates as an outside object that attempts to satisfy sexual urges or desires and bring the user some type of sensuous pleasure. Commodity fetishism places a type of “supernatural value” on an otherwise “natural” object. Pornography, in its simplest form, is merely a natural sexual encounter between homo sapiens. However, users often assign a supernatural value associated with endless amounts of sexual gratification, affection, power, or elevated feelings of domination, love, or affirmations in masculinity and/or femininity. This is why you rarely meet someone who has used pornography only a few times. More importantly, ascribing this supernatural value to porn as a commodity masks the relationships underlying it.

Furthermore, Marx created several other concepts to help develop the broader process of commodity fetishism. These are use and exchange value and concrete and abstract labor. Each commodity has a use value and exchange value assigned to it. The use value can be expressed as the utility for someone. The use value of pornography is to get people sexually aroused and to give them a repeated ability to achieve (fabricated) sexual gratification. Marx further explains: “The utility of a thing makes it a use value. But this utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity” (Marx 1867). This means that pornography’s ability to sexually satisfy people is inseparable from its existence, so we cannot analyze it as an independent object. The exchange value describes the average necessary labor required to produce a finished product. For pornography, the exchange value is the amount of “socially necessary labor time” that goes into making and distributing the pornography. Use and exchange value are thus combined in the commodity and these terms provide a means of understanding the labor in and, subsequently, the monetary value of pornography. Concrete labor is reflective of the definite ways people produce pornography and is the foundation for use value. Abstract labor is expressed in the moment of exchange, and both concrete and abstract labor are reflective of the relative and equivalent monetary exchange. Marx clarifies that, “The value of a commodity would therefore remain constant, if the labor time required for its production also remained constant. But the latter changes with every variation in the productiveness of labor” (Marx 1867). So, the concrete and abstract labor that go into making pornography is reassigned in its value frequently, meaning that the cost (in dollars) of pornography will always be subject to change – there is no singular value assigned to it, it is non-static.

However, pornography isn’t a product that supernaturally arises and grants things like sexual gratification or feelings of affection or empowerment. As a commodity, it is a complex and intricate system of relationships; relationships of value, labor, and especially people. People are pornography, meaning that people quite literally make up pornography; they produce it while also ascribing certain values to it, making it what it has become today. In viewing pornography as a commodity, users are dismissing the social relationships embedded within it, which allows the labor and people involved to be used as means to an end, un-recognizing them as fellow autonomous human beings.

Our society has separated (or is in the process of separating) pornography from any form of relationship so that it exists in its own space; as a discrete, private thing people can view for their own pleasure. Pornography has become totally cut off from reality—viewing it as a real set of relationships existing “out in the real world” is not “the correct way” to look at pornography. Pornography is a system of relationships that is being sold as a product. By revealing the commodity fetishism associated with it, we are turning our understanding upside down—de-fetishizing it. We need to recognize digital pornography for what it is, break the notion that it functions as solely a commodity with supernatural or transcendent powers, and deliberately consider the effects its production, exchange, and use have on our society.

Reference

Building a Literary Home

Macy Davis
senior | english

2018 and 2019 mark the 150th anniversary of Louisa May Alcott’s well-loved children’s novel, Little Women. This novel, and Alcott’s other works continue to have contemporary relevance for readers. The poetic collection, “Building a Literary Home” is a series of three poems responding to the concepts of home as presented in Alcott’s works and life. “Dear Jo” examines seclusion and the idea of a space of one’s own. “The Learning Experience of Boys,” examines gender and the concept of a found-family using text from Little Men. “Welcome to our home,” $10 Admittance” engages with Orchard House, Alcott’s home, which has been turned into a Museum, and biographical information about Alcott to contextualize her writings about home. These poems posit that the desire for the home and domestic space is one reason that readers continue to find relevance and resonance within Alcott’s texts.

Keywords: Louisa May Alcott, home, Little Women, Orchard House, poetry

Dear Jo,

How is the garret?
The favorite literary hiding spot
writing spot, the kind of space
I would have loved to have, but

made for myself in a yellow-walled
bedroom for 20 years before it was
painted beige and sold. Your
unquiet wanderings up in the garret

have called for recollections of relics
of childhood and girlhood to be examined
since our introduction. Jo, I have been you
since I met you. I have seen

my own Meg and my own Amy
wonder away from the shared space
where we created castles in cattle
pastures, no room for a Beth in

the small-town history I have written
for myself in that liminal, limiting space as
your slowly increasing pile of blotted manuscript mirrors
my half-filled notebooks. Isn’t there something,

about the place you learned to love to write?
Doesn’t losing it hurt? The home found in sisters
And dusty space shifts, and the dirt between my
toes is no longer the same, and I wonder

Jo, when you went to New York, to go
away for a time, did you ever stop wishing
that you were still in the Concord house?
Because, I can’t stop wishing for the

Kansas house and the places that
taught me and my sisters to run wild. Jo,
do you ever stop wishing, about sisters and home,
that things hadn’t changed at all?
The Learning Experience of Boys

“Is this Plumfield?” - Louisa May Alcott, *Little Men*

*Beguiling the rainy twilight*

The best laughter is found in a forest of forgotten tomorrows and a fire kindled with the birch bark peeled off of trees and taken from my back.

*A world so full of sunshine*

The summer I turned 21, I spent two months at an all-boys camp in the middle-of-nowhere Maine. Such a change from the seclusion I’d found in the sunflower spaces of the plains I’d long called home. I left them for the mountains, but before I ever landed in Colorado, I learned to drink cheap beer in the shadow of Tumbledown. I watched new sunsets in the space of the Gap amid the pleasant hum of young voices.

*The pleasant hum of young voices*

Light and warmth and comfort come from a country bar or the space under the dining hall where we turned summersaults after taps. College boys and camaraderie and the books I’d not read since childhood made it feel like this is home... this place is made... to learn.

*This is home... this place is made... to learn*

Shoulders fly into a front flip
And knees push up on water skis.
I carved my initials into the lodge pole pines and wondered what it meant to be a girl

*Running wild*

In space that is not made for me.
And I’m going back next summer
To a place where

*I’d like to see the sun rise*

And I wonder what it means
To make home in a place
So different from any that I’d ever let myself know.
But in the curves of the highway and the trees I’d drown myself in there is a place like

*The home in the willow*
“Welcome to our home,” $10 admittance


See how easy it is to leave out the sojourns across the seas? The desire for something never found. Louisa May Alcott lived in twenty-two houses before the one I can take a tour of.

The home made into a monument was never the space visitors want it to be, despite Louisa’s love for a room of her own, not when the authoress kept escaping back to Boston when she could escape duty.

Museum mixing of fact and fiction, two structures soldered together by Bronson’s hand and time. A creation of a home within four sisters, not within the space that held them, gentle footsteps and a lack of money not for a lack of trying.

Those walls hold a stalwart mother and a sense of stick-to-itiveness that drove the writing and the homes that were created for female characters and female readers.

Millions have made the pilgrimage praising the paper-thin veneer of joy that makes materiality what matters, such desire for a domestic space.
THE BATTLE OF TRENTON

Jacob Mikuls
senior | finance

This article gives an in-depth look into the actions, both direct and indirect, that took place during the planning and fighting of the Battle of Trenton. The paper addresses the significance and historical impact of this battle while also giving a deeper look at the two main proponents of the Battle: George Washington and Nathanael Greene.

Keywords: American Revolution, George Washington, Nathanael Greene, The Battle of Trenton

There are few scenes in the history of any country that are able to so aptly generalize and accentuate the feelings and emotions of that country in one picture. The image of George Washington Crossing the Delaware is an image that does just that for Americans. The bold, strong and stoic Washington is at the bow of his small boat, standing firmly and unwavering in the cold December wind. The painting of Washington’s Crossing by German-American painter Emmanuel Leutze is maybe the most famous image in American history.

The above painting is one that many Americans see in school, and one that most Americans will know at least something about, but the story behind this painting is far more important. Washington’s crossing of the Delaware is a pivotal point in American history; it is one of the few places where, had the American side been unsuccessful, there would most likely not be an America today. Washington’s crossing and the following Battle of Trenton helped to turn the tide of the American Revolution, but there are many aspects of this battle that are unknown to the average citizen. One example is the amount of planning and quiet cooperation that went into it. Knowing more about the battle can thus change what seemed like an impulsive maneuver into a well-thought-out strategy of a military genius. There were also other
historically significant figures at the Battle of Trenton, which is a fact that hardly anyone knows. This underscores how much of a giant George Washington truly is as he overshadows everyone else who was present. The historical significance of the Battle of Trenton is also an aspect that goes seemingly unnoticed, yet, without a victory there, it is likely that the Colonials would have lost the Revolutionary War.

"THE BATTLE OF TRENTON TOOK PLACE ON DECEMBER 26TH, 1776, BUT THE PLAN WAS PUT IN ACTION ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT."

It is apparent from Washington’s notes and letters that he was moving forces into proper position as much as two weeks in advance of his planned attack on Trenton. Washington was giving orders to Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson and others to take necessary measures to secure important ferries and to find locations that would be good for fording the Delaware River (Washington 2013, 305). Washington knew the value of controlling who was allowed to cross the river, and he knew if he could control it, especially in the area around Trenton, then he could essentially control the flow of people and information from the North into New Jersey and all the way down into Philadelphia. Washington was also smart enough to only send information about the initial movements of his plan, to avoid any information being stolen. Although he never states this, it is easy to infer that he only relayed information about plans that the enemy would be able to easily anticipate or easily see through. The Delaware River was an important area, due to its access to Philadelphia and the surrounding area, so the British could easily expect troop movements in and around the Trenton area. What was unexpected, as history proves, was the idea of a return attack on Christmas night, at a time when the weather was harsh. Washington lost more men to the cold as they moved along the Delaware River than he did during the actual fighting that occurred (Fischer 2004, 406).

The Battle of Trenton took place on December 26th, 1776, but the plan was put in action on Christmas night. Washington devised a plan to cross the Delaware River with over five-thousand men. The icy conditions on the river, however, forbade almost three-thousand of Washington’s men from crossing (Washington 2013, 442). Washington still went forward with his plan, and early in the morning of December 26th, he took approximately fifteen-hundred Hessian mercenaries by surprise. Losses were minimal on both sides, but the victory gave the Colonial army a new sign of hope, a sign that some believed helped to win the war.

One aspect of this battle that is often overlooked is the hardships that the soldiers faced. There are many stories of soldiers being forced to walk long distances, row boats, and tread freezing water, while only wearing a light jacket and not even having boots. Many men were known to have simply wrapped their feet in cloth to do whatever they could to fight off the cold. This led to many men losing finger, toes, hands and feet to frostbite. The sheer strength of the Colonial soldiers is simply astounding.

It is important to understand the conditions that Washington was facing in December of 1776. The Colonial government was in complete disarray, as their chances of victory looked slimmer and slimmer. Washington was under immense pressure, both from his peers and from politicians. If he couldn’t find success soon, it was likely that he would be forced to turn over control of the Continental Army to someone else. Washington, however, had faith in his strategies, but also knew he needed to prove that he was still an able leader. He gathered information and devised a plan. He first engaged the Hessian force and, after a brief skirmish, signaled a retreat. Next, according to his journals and Hessian sources, Washington planted disinformation. He “released” a phony loyalist, who returned to the Hessians. The fake loyalist claimed he escaped the Colonials and that they had ordered a full retreat and would not be coming back to Trenton (Kilmeade and Yaeger 2013, 29). The Hessians saw this as a chance to settle down and celebrate Christmas, and what better way to celebrate than with fortuitous amounts of alcohol. Washington knew that he would be able to catch the Hessians unaware and possibly intoxicated, which is exactly what happened on December 26th.

Washington, around the end of 1776, was beginning to receive immense pressure to begin winning battles, or at least to stop losing as many battles as he was losing. This was to be expected from the politicians who were backing him. All the founders who had signed the Declaration of Independence had essentially signed their lives away. If Washington wasn’t successful, King George would (quite literally) have all their heads. It may have been this mounting pressure that forced Washington to finally make a move of his own at Trenton. Washington is often described as a brave, stoic leader, which may have led to this maneuver. It is almost certain that if the crossing of the Delaware had backfired, the war for independence would have simply ended. Without any political allies left to back him, and no victories to show for his effort, Washington would have looked foolish, and would have most likely been stripped of his title as leader of the Continental Army.

It is important to look at the numbers to really understand just how successful Washington was in his surprise attack on the Hessian forces on Christmas of 1776. The American forces numbered over 5,000 and received only 7 recorded casualties. The Hessian side was much smaller, a mere 1,500, but suffered over 100 dead or wounded and had nearly 1,000 men captured. This means that Washington was able to incapacitate over seventy percent of the Hessian force. The Americans hadn’t experienced a victory of this magnitude in months and defeating such expertly trained and armed forces like the
Hessian mercenaries would have been a huge boost to the morale of the Colonial Army.

“THE VICTORY AT TRENTON HAD TRULY FAR-REACHING EFFECTS. NOT ONLY DID IT RAISE MORALE AROUND THE COLONIES, BUT IT ALSO BEGAN TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE BRITISH TO END THE WAR.”

George Washington was not the only American commander at the Battle of Trenton. While Washington receives all the credit, and the front seat on the row boat, Nathanael Greene was also present during the Battle of Trenton. Nathanael Greene may be the second best known American commander from the period of the American Revolution. Known mostly for his performance in the Southern Colonies later in the war, it is important to note that Greene was vying for Washington’s position as leader of the Continental Army, and that a failure on Washington’s part would have likely created enough pressure that it would have caused Washington to lose his job. Greene, however, received no credit for assisting Washington in the battle. Greene believed that he should be leading the Continental Army at this point in time. He saw Washington’s lack of success as reason enough for a change in command, but the victory at Trenton dashed most of the hopes that Greene had of leading the Continental Army.

The victory at Trenton had truly far-reaching effects. Not only did it raise morale...
Washington received numerous letters from founding fathers and the like, all of which praised him for his genius in using his forces to defeat an enemy as highly trained and respected as Hessian mercenaries.

Nathanael Greene, on the other hand, wrote few letters about his victory at Trenton. In fact, the only person to whom he wrote was his wife, Catherine, and he didn't write her until four days after the battle had been won. Greene was extremely modest when writing about his participation, choosing instead to write on the significance of the event as a whole. Greene wrote that:

“This is an important period to America, big with great events. God only knows what will be the issue of this Campaign, but everything wears a much better prospect than they have for some weeks past” (Greene 1998, 377).

Comparing the moods of the two American leaders – Washington and Greene – gives a new and different view of both men. For maybe the first time ever, Washington seems to be more of a braggart, where Greene appears to be a humble servant of his country. While Washington's writings are not what we would consider bragging by modern standards, I simply mean that the ever-honest and trustworthy George Washington, father of the United States, seems to be pressing his success while Greene appears more content to simply accept his role as a supporting character of the revolution. Whatever the facts may be, Washington obviously still saw the ability in Greene both as a leader and a strategist, and these two abilities were also noticed by the other leaders of the revolution. Greene's willingness to accept his role and to do as others saw fit of him may have been what led him to receiving control of the war's southern front. Without the humble Greene by his side, George Washington would still most likely have had success at Trenton. However, it is extremely unlikely that Washington would have been able to win the war without Greene's knowledge and expertise. It seems that Washington's reward for the victory was recognition, Greene's reward for loyalty was advancement, and the infantry's reward was simply more rum (Washington 2013, 453).

Unbeknownst to most Americans, Washington is partially responsible for the creation of America's first spy ring. Washington embarked on a mission that many militants thought would be unsuccessful. George Washington himself was doubtful about the operation. Washington, in a letter to Colonel John Cadwalader, said that:

“Notwithstanding the discouraging Accounts I have received from Col. Reed of what might be expected from the Operations below, I am determined, as
the night is favourable, to cross the River, & make the attack upon Trenton in the Morning. If you can do nothing real, at least create as great a diversion as possible. I am sir your most obt servant” (Washington 2013, 439).

Washington was obviously doubtful about the outcome of his attack on Trenton. It is easy to see just how desperate Washington was becoming. Not only was he willing to attack a force that he knew had superior training and equipment, but he was willing to do so on Christmas morning. While many may recall the phrase “all is fair in love and war,” it is still one of few engagements to be had on the birthday of Jesus Christ in a time when atheism was persecuted, and non-Christians were scorned.

While everyone is aware of the outcome of the Battle of Trenton, few know what took place and how the battle developed. Luckily, an officer on George Washington’s staff wrote a detailed account of the battle and it has survived to this day. According to this unnamed officer:

“It was broad daylight when we came to a house where a man was chopping wood. He was very much surprised when he saw us. ‘Can you tell me where the Hessian picket is?’ Washington asked. The man hesitated, but I said, ‘You need not be frightened, it is General Washington who asks the question.’ His face brightened and he pointed toward the house of Mr. Howell. It was just 8 o’clock. Looking down the road I saw a Hessian running out from the house. He yelled in Dutch [German] and swung his arms. Three or four others came out with their guns. Two of them fired at us, but the bullets whistled over our heads. Some of General [Adam] Stephen’s men rushed forward and captured two. The other took to their heels, running toward Mr [Alexander] Calhoun’s house, where the picket guard was stationed, about twenty men under Captain Altenbrockum. They came running out of the house. The Captain flourished his sword and tried to form his men. Some of them fired at us, others ran toward the village. The next moment we heard drums beat and a bugle sound, and then from the west came the boom of a cannon. General Washington’s face lighted up instantly for he knew that it was one of Sullivan’s guns. We could see a great commotion down toward the meeting-house, men running here and there, officers swinging their swords, artillerymen harnessing their horses. Captain [Thomas] Forrest unlimbered his guns. Washington gave the order to advance, and rushed on the junction of King and Queen streets. . . . We saw Rall come riding up the street from his headquarters, which were at Stacy Potts’ house. We could hear him shouting in Dutch, ‘My brave soldiers, advance!’ His men were frightened and confused, for our men were firing upon them from fences and houses and they were falling fast. Instead of advancing they ran into an apple orchard. The officers tried to rally them, but our men kept advancing and picking off the officers. It was not long before Rall tumbled from his horse and his soldiers threw down their guns and gave themselves up as prisoners” (Styker 1898).

It seems strange that the Colonial Army could make the fierce Hessian force run in fear as they (allegedly) did. It is often best to take historical accounts like this one with a grain of salt, as there is often some embellishment that takes place. This may have been written to impress family or to try to overemphasize the officer’s involvement in the battle. It is, however, safe to take most of the account for face value. The Hessians did, in fact, retreat to an orchard and there were failed attempts to rally them. Nonetheless, this is an important account as it comes from someone who wasn’t of elite status, so we can assume that they had little to gain in writing this account, except to maybe impress a few family members or to inform neighbors of Washington’s victory at Trenton.

Now that we have seen the military side of the conflict, it is important to examine
how noncombatants perceived the war. One of the best views that we have of this war is that of Margaret Hill Morris. Morris was a widow who lived in Burlington. She witnessed acts of malice from all sides: Colonial, Hessian, Tory, and British. Morris gives numerous accounts throughout her journal. None of the entries talk about the Battle of Trenton specifically, but the entries give a genuine view of the civilian perspective of the war. For instance, just days before the battle, Morris noted Hessian movements around the town she wrote that:

"24th [December 1776] . . . Several Hessians in Town to day — They went to Dan Smiths and enquired for several articles in the Shop, which they offered to pay for — 2 were observed to be in liquor in the Street, they went to the Tavern, & calling for Rum ordered the Man to Charge it to the King—we hear that 2 houses in the Skirts of the Town were broke open & pillaged by the Hessions." (Morris 1949).

Morris was well aware that the Colonials as well as the British were committing heinous crimes and wrongly imprisoning those who had done no wrong. This account happens less than two weeks before the Battle of Trenton and gives us an unbiased look into what was really happening in New Jersey during the Revolutionary War.

"THERE ARE MANY MINISCULE DETAILS THAT HELPED SHAPE THIS EVENT . . ."

This genuine, unbiased view of the Hessian forces and how they treated civilians brings great light to how those who lived in the colonies would’ve viewed the occupation of a completely foreign force. Morris, however, made similar notes about Colonial atrocities as well. Noting mainly that people were willing to turn on their neighbors during times of war. Morris claimed that:

"13th [December 1776] . . . the spirit of the Divil still continued to rove thro the Town in the shape of Tory Hunters . . . some of the Gentlemen who entertained the foreigners were pointed out to the Gondola Men—2 Worthy inhabitants were seized upon & dragged on board . . . Parties of Amrd Men rudely enterd the Houses in Town, & diligent search made for Tories, the 2 last taken released & sent on Shore—some of the Gondola Gentry broke into & pillagd R Smiths House on the bank" (Morris 1949).

The American Revolution is a war that defined the culture of the United States. It is a revolution whose effects have impacted countries across seas and is still impacting the world today. It was a war which based itself on the principles of enlightenment thinkers and looked to create a country in which all men are created equal. The American revolution couldn’t have been successful without the extraordinary men behind it. The giants of American history, such as George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and many other great American founders were critical in the establishment of the United States. More important than all of that, however, was the success of a seemingly last-ditch effort to surprise foreign mercenaries on Christmas morning. Had George Washington not boldly led a handful of undertrained, poorly-equipped Americans to attack the superior Hessian force at Trenton and had George Washington not been successful in his attempt, one would be hard-pressed to argue that the American Revolution could have continued at all, let alone that the Colonial Army could have released themselves from the grip of King George III. The underlying details of an event that is so important to, not only an entire war, but to an entire country often go unnoticed and unheard. There are many minuscule details that helped shape this event and contributed to the efforts of a seemingly outnumbered and undertrained group of men to use ingenious military tactics to surprise a superior force. Had all of these minor details not been considered, there may not have been an opportunity for George Washington to create an advantage, as small as it may have been, for himself. This could have easily led to his removal from leadership of the Continental Army, and then to the defeat of the colonists and the end of the American Revolution. The image that has been painted of the crossing of the Delaware, both literally and figuratively, is one of brave American soldiers risking their lives in the frigid conditions of the unforgiving Northeastern winter to defend their God-given rights and to help create a country that would hinge on revolutionary ideas.

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