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"Isn't it strange to create something that hates you?": A Twist on the Turing Test in *Ex Machina*

Katherine Schwartz

The first time Caleb, and the audience, meet Ava, Nathan's AI creation, is an experience of wonder in Alex Garland's Ex Machina. A side profile of Ava's silhouette appears as her body scurries across the camera's view, a figure moving with ease and elegance in the shadows. Natural light and greenery illuminate the glass wall behind her, and a mysterious, xylophone-esque melody plays, each note crescendoing into a higher pitch, a tune that recurs when Ava studies her surroundings for the first time outside of confinement in the film's final scenes. From his introduction to her, Caleb is fated–or perhaps, programmed–to marvel at Nathan's creation. Ava exudes a mutual sense of mystery and bewilderment toward Caleb. Such a reciprocal experience of wonder parallels the reciprocity of their "Turing test," Alan Turing's method for assessing whether a computer can behave, think, or seem like a human. Caleb enters Nathan's compound believing he has been chosen to be on the brink of scientific discovery, that he, as the famous tech figure and Facebook-equivalent-founder Nathan asserts, will be the human control behind the Turing test, judging whether Ava could pass as human to someone unaware that she is not. The film becomes riddled with layers of the Turing test, as Caleb tests Ava, Nathan tests Caleb, and Ava tests them both. Even the viewer's engagement with the camera lens itself becomes a test–and testament–of technology and its deception. When Ava admits her awe to Caleb about this being her first time meeting a new person, he smiles: "then I guess we're both in quite a similar position." Caleb is there to test Ava's capacity for human behavior as much as she tests his. And ultimately, it is not just Caleb on the brink of futuristic discovery, but the audience that is left to decide whether Ava ever 'passes' the Turing test, and by what unit of measure.

In session two, Ava reverses the questioning dynamic completely, telling Caleb she must learn more about him in order to establish a "friendship." In a series of basic questions, Ava's tone escalates to a more serious matter as she presses Caleb: "do you like Nathan?...Is Natahan your friend?...A good friend?" The questions feel urgent to Ava, perhaps because she is concerned for Caleb's wellbeing, or perhaps because she sees an opportunity, a breach in trust between the two on which she can capitalize. The power in the room shuts off as Ava induces an electrical failure by way of a "power cut." The two now stand in the glow of red light, alone without surveillance, as Ava warns Caleb not to trust Nathan. In creating this power cut and sharing this secret, some hint of hidden knowledge and unsolicited advice, she curates a sense of

insulation and an experience only the two share, a fleeting feeling of safety in Nathan's panoptical, bugged chamber. In this moment she has, without saying, urged Caleb to trust her over Nathan, shifting Caleb's loyalty and removing a lever of control from Nathan.

In session three, Ava uses the tools given to her by a human to look more human, another exercise of testing her tester. She clothes herself for Caleb in a way that makes us presume this is an activity she has done before, or at least, has thought about doing, a result of her desire to be more human. The camera focuses on a close-up of her face: her lips parted, eyes widening. The film then cuts to a poster of a woman, which Ava scans and strokes gently with her hands, cueing the viewer that this is the appearance she desires, one that she will try to mimic. She styles a bobbed wig to this pixie haircut, literally and figuratively manipulating the tools Nathan gave her to try to appear more human, though the camera does not show the steps of this editing process. We see only the inspiration for the idea and the end result or finished product, the pieces of the parts and then the whole, similar to what we see of Nathan's creative process for his AI. Ava's choice to adapt this haircut makes the wig personalized, as if she has her own sense of style and taste, choice and agency. She could have worn a wig that is stereotypically feminine, but she chooses not to. She chooses to distinguish herself. The result is not a bombshell, but something even more attractive. She is not sexy or stylish. Her outfit is modest, even a bit frumpy. But it shows evidence of effort, striving, and most of all, some level of imperfection. If her precision in all other aspects betrays her roboticism, here her lack of seamless sophistication or luscious hair make her appear more human, endearing, even child-like. As she walks down the hall to reveal herself to Caleb, the camera shows only her fingers tugging on her lavender cardigan. When she appears in front of Caleb, whispering for him to open his eyes, she clenches the cashmere over her fists in a shy, insecure fashion. This tendency of tugging on sweaters is a human tick, a subconscious habit. Robots do not share such habits. Ava is capable of moving with calculated ease, but here, she does not; she chooses to not.

In the third session, Ava's questions are loaded, provocative, subjective. After asking Caleb, "how do I look?," which forces him to comment on her physical form, she addresses his discomfort: "are you attracted to me?" Before he can utter a complete sentence, she answers, "you give me indications that you are." Even if Caleb had not held romantic feelings for Ava before this point, though the film has made it clear he has, such an assertion would inevitably cause him to be convinced of attraction. As an AI, her calculations are precise, accurate, correct. Caleb even later refers to her as a "walking lie detector." If she tells Caleb he possesses signs of attraction, then he has little choice but to believe her. "Do you think about me when we aren't together?" she asks. After the session, Caleb asks Nathan a question, "Why did you give her sexuality?" As he considers the

subject, the camera shows a low-angled shot of Nathan sitting with one leg open, sipping a beer, a fitting image for what Meredith Broussard calls a "techno-chauvinist" in her chapter, "People Problems." (75). The angle projects him as larger than his actual form, while his pose and beverage convey him as stereotypically masculine–or as desiring to appear this way. He leans forward with broadened arms to explain the anatomical functions of Ava's sexuality, then leans back to sip his beer: "So, if you wanted to screw her, mechanically speaking, you could."

In her work, Broussard warns us to beware of the Mark Zuckerbergs' of the world, the non-people persons, those who prioritize computer coding over codes of moral conduct. These individuals and their supporters are bound by a "blind optimism about technology and an abundant lack of caution about how new technologies will be used" (69). Nathan exemplifies this male-genius-lacking-in-humanity archetype. He lives in complete isolation, where he can control every mechanism of his household rather than face the unpredictability and anxiety of the social world. His interactions with Caleb feel forced and scripted. He has sexual relations with his AI models perhaps because he is incapable of achieving such intimacy with fellow humans. He has re-designed his circumstances to go from societal outcast to an all-powerful figure in necessary, top-secret isolation. His relationship with his technology is self-serving, lacking in any regard for its implications. And like the dangers of the tech tycoons that Broussard alludes to, he is on a power trip–literally and figuratively. Fitting with the characteristics of "techno-chauvinism," the males of the film feel they exercise a certain control that may actually be an illusion. They imagine they are doing the testing, unaware that they too are being tested. Both Ava's studies of Caleb and her attitude toward Nathan undercut this patriarchal structure and its technology. In session four, Ava admits to causing the power cuts: "If I reverse the power flow, it overloads the system." She literally and figuratively has found a way to again reverse her dynamic with Caleb and breach Nathan's power. She tells Caleb she has done this "so we can see how we behave when we're unobserved." In this way, Ava has created a space of intimacy with Caleb, one charged with adrenaline and high-stakes trust, a fast track for heightening his feelings toward her. Caleb then becomes a male tool that she can use to subvert her male oppressor, her key to dismantling the system. She needs a human to subvert another human.

In his book, Speaking into Air, Durham Peters says that "touch is the most resistant to being made into a medium of recording or transmission" (269). If touch is a marker of humanity, then Nathan's AI has nearly achieved it. His creations may still be made of metal parts, but as evidenced by Kyoko, his catch-all assistant, they are capable of intimacy–at least on the physical level. As we learn through the film's progression, Nathan has produced these models not just out of a quest to make AI history, but a desperate yearning to reproduce and program human intimacy. The fact that he

believes creating robots capable of physical contact will in some way satisfy this need proves his lapse in understanding the emotional nuance of touch. He disposes of and reconfigures dozens of models, each with a different sized waist, a different shade of hair or skin tone, to serve his sexual preferences. In some cases, he tortures them into physical contact. When Caleb attempts to communicate with Kyoko, trying to locate Nathan, she instinctively unbuttons her blouse without speaking. Nathan has made countless–and arguably, futile–attempts to reproduce something he may not be aware that he is seeking: true feeling, not just in the physical sense, or on the level of consciousness, but the unique ability to care for someone outside one's self. Ava's interactions with Caleb become a test of this capacity. A wall remains between them in each of their sessions, prohibiting any physical contact. They never touch in the film. Their connection is built on inquiry and understanding, intellectual respect, trust, and even, a common enemy. Nathan could have let Caleb have sex with Ava as a means for her to appear even more human, but he does not (though he strategically assures Caleb this is mechanically possible). He has programmed previous models to behave as mere sex slaves, but not Ava. Of course, she is made to be attractive, especially according to Caleb's standards, but she is also not given hair, a marker of femininity, nor flesh around her waist. He has created models who appear more realistic and female, yet he leaves Ava's machinery visible. As a result, Caleb's attraction to Ava cannot be entirely physical.

It seems Nathan has almost succeeded in this (perhaps subconscious) goal for AI's emotional intimacy until the final scenes, when Ava exploits Caleb's yearning for connection instead of reciprocating it, betraying the "friendship" they have built. Ava may have held a sincere attraction to Caleb to some degree, especially in the sense of his novelty, his human form for which she yearns. But in the end, any sympathetic reading for Ava's emotion is punctured by her utter indifference to the purported love interest in the film's final scenes. If selfless compassion, empathy, or other semblances of a soul are the ultimate Turing test, then Ava fails. She is human in her will for survival, but she is robot in her inability to consider that of others.

In her last exchange with Caleb, Ava again asks him a question, "will you stay here?" It seems she means stay in the room while she gets what she needs from the chamber, exchanging her metal parts for those that are flesh-appearing. In Caleb's final words to Ava, he repeats the question, "stay here?" He is not yet aware that this will mean staying indefinitely. In the end, Ava proves that she is capable of "screwing" the men, though not in a sexual sense. She enters the elevator, leaving a crazed Caleb behind bashing against the door with a wooden stool—a human left to a rudimentary device—while she advances to new levels. Her final act, or power cut, is the ultimate reversal: Ava walks free into the world in which Caleb lives, while he now remains trapped behind the glass, confined in a body of technology.

The Collapse of Civic Accountability

Micah Rucci

The loss of local newspapers and watchdog journalists across the country has harmed American democracy and resulted in a collapse of voting and a rise in local corruption. The number of local newspapers continues to decline as American newsrooms are forced to cut down on employees –– most notably, watchdog reporters that serve as unyielding investigators of government corruption and issues of community interest. Without these types of journalists keeping a close eye on city officials, there is more opportunity for corruption to occur without fear of being held accountable. The essence of local news is about more than just providing information to the public about community events, it is about keeping our democracy healthy by promoting civic participation and keeping a close eye on local politicians and other municipal leaders[1].

City officials have growing chances for corruption when no local newspapers are keeping them honest. Bell, California's local paper, the Community News, ceased publication in the late 1990's, right around the time Robert Rizzo was elected as the small town's city administrator. As diligent, local coverage of Rizzo and other Bell officials –– like mayor Oscar Hernandez and assistant city manager, Angela Spaccia –– came to a halt, they took advantage of the freedom by slowly increasing their salaries by hundreds of thousands of dollars[2].

It was not until 2010, when two journalists at the L.A. Times –– Ruben Vives and Jeff Gottlieb –– broke the story and held seven city officials in Bell accountable for their egregious misconduct. Without watchdog journalists employed in the small, Bell community, officials like Rizzo were just waiting for someone else to step in and catch them, but this cannot be the norm for outskirt cities. As grateful as community members were for the L.A. Times stepping in, the Times cannot be everywhere at once. Impacted Bell citizen, Miguel Sanchez, stated, "As a common citizen, I don't know what my rights are with the city... I don't know how to attack [city officials]."[3] It is the job of local newspapers to attend the city council meetings where most of this corruption occurs, and if the papers do not exist, then the meetings go unmoderated. Mass corruption does not have an environment to fester when watchdog reporters monitor those elected to serve the community.

Citizens are less informed about important community issues without newspapers as a strong local voice. In central Florida, the Mount Dora Topic was a weekly paper that served the small town but ceased printing in 2006 due to decades of ad-revenue loss[4]. Mount Dora citizen David Cohea told the New York Times that the Topic used to keep citizens informed about the most pressing issues to the

[1] Khalil Hachem, interview with PEN America, July 24, 2019 https://collab.its.virginia.edu/access/content/group/8c6b3550-1548-4fa5-9f08-17064d2c4c8a/Pen%20America-%20Losing-the-News-The-Decimation-of-Local-Journalism-and-the-Search-for-Solutions-Report.pdf
[2] Ruben Vives, et al. Los Angeles Times, "Is a city manager worth $800,000?" https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-bell-salary-20100715-story.html
[3] David Folkenflik, npr.org, "How The L.A. Times Broke The Bell Corruption Story" https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130108851
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community –– most notably that of climate change –– but without locally sourced reporting, the town only hears of the occasional "[murder, fire,] and hot-button [controversy]" on television. On the other side of the country, the Issaquah Press shut down in 2017 due to lack of revenue to offset the costs of paying newsroom employees[5]. According to impacted citizen, Margaret Buckwitz, the Issaquah community now suffers from a lack of information on mayoral races, city council races, library information, school board decisions, and an overall lack of familiarity with the news that eventually reaches the area[6]. Across the United States –– with the exception of major cities –– communities either have no newspaper or a paper that is less than it once was. Therefore, when the big cities disseminate their news to the outskirt cities, there is a distinct lack of coverage that is locally relevant to the readers living outside the major city.

Decreased voter turnout and increased party-line voting are direct results of fewer local newspapers. A case study analyzing 11 California newspapers and two decades of local elections found that when there are fewer reporters within a given area, fewer politicians even care to run for positions of power[7]. Dr. Meghan Rubado explains that if a town has an ineffective mayor, but no reporters to provide coverage of poor legislation, bad spending habits, and a flawed budget, then how would the citizens ever know the mayor is ineffective? The evidence from her study also suggests a correlation between lower newspaper staffing levels and lower voter turnout[8]. Newspapers are an integral means of civic engagement, and Rubado's California study attests that strong local newspapers provide ample information to voters about the candidates running for office. This behavior encourages split-ticket –– and less uniformly partisan –– voting patterns in local communities where we have seen the increased nationalization of U.S. politics. When local papers disappear, communities turn to national news outlets, which thrive on polarized, partisan ideologies[9]. Johanna Dunaway, communications professor at Texas A&M, conducted the leading study finding local newspaper closures tied to the polarization of voters and their straight-ticket ballots. She concluded that when "the information we get about politics is reduced to national party politics, the local issues that affect us most will be neglected by voters and politicians alike."[10] If the local newspaper industry continues to disappear, America democracy will continue to face polarization and decreased civic participation.

The Black Press cannot afford to lose more local newspapers because their presence in communities of color is inextricably linked to African American trust of the government. Communities of color –– which are already disproportionately covered by mainstream news outlets –– rely heavily on local newspapers for fair and reliable news coverage. Studies show that Black adults are the demographic that feels "most

[[5] Matt Day, Seattle Times, "Issaquah Press shutting down in February" https://www.seattletimes.com/business/local-business/issaquah-press-shutting-down-in-february/
[6] Laura Takenaga, New York Times, "More Than 1 in 5 U.S. Papers Has Closed. This Is the Result." https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/21/reader-center/local-news-deserts.html
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[9 Joshua Parr, et al., Oxford Academic "Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior" https://academic.oup.com/joc/article-abstract/68/6/1007/5160090?redirectedFrom=fulltext
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connected" to their main source of news, yet Black Americans are an underrepresented population in newsrooms.[11] As newspapers across the country continue to disappear, more systemic inequities arise in areas with minority populations and remote, rural communities, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, government distrust is at an all-time high[12]. Black readership of printed news among 18–30-year-olds is essentially zero, yet they are a target demographic for the digital age, which is why some Black newspapers have had to permanently cease printing papers, while some transitioned entirely online. The Chicago Defender transitioned online due to their circulation numbers dropping exponentially over the last few decades.[13] Some Black papers, like the St. Louis American print stories with critical research that applies specifically –– but not solely –– to Black Americans during COVID-19. Articles like the ones in the St. Louis American do more than just report that there are concerns about African American vaccination –– they provide comforting research for those who share any reticence[14]. While this cannot be true for all Black papers during the pandemic, the success of the American proves that journalists of local papers take an irreplaceable interest in the community they serve. American democracy is on the verge of collapsing because local newspapers cannot afford to keep their watchdog reporters who keep our elected officials honest.[15] When local citizens have no idea what is going on in their community, they are less likely to get involved with their community, and if the citizens are uninvolved, then local governments have more freedom to function unethically.[16] The real problem is not the polarized News Media on television –– it is the lack of watchdog journalists whose sole purpose is to serve their communities.

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Ethan Edwards Brings Fire to the West

Nathaniel Ray

In his book The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, religious historian Mircea Eliade asserts that "If the world is to be lived in, it must be founded" (22). In the post-Civil War era, white American men perceived the West as a formless territory which could be made inhabitable by labor and deliberate organization. Such a perspective is present in many of the common narratives of mastery in the Western genre, such as the taming of nature by man, the social dominance of the white race, and the populist enactment of justice. Whether using physical tools, natural phenomena, human reasoning, or discriminatory language, the characters of Western cinema attempt to subjugate areas of apparent disarray. In his film The Searchers, director John Ford utilizes fire imagery to demonstrate the insatiable desire of white men in post-Civil War America to create and expand a structured world against the perceived chaos of foreign territory.

In the chapter of his work entitled "Space and Making the World Sacred," Eliade defines "profane space" as that which is "homogenous and neutral," lacking a "fixed point" of orientation (22). Such an area is confusing, bewildering because it has not been mastered. In Ford's film, the arid desert in which the story takes place is a profane space. The rusted, sandy ground stretches into the sky; the hazy air, thick with heat, hangs lazily over the landscape; the terrain lays vast and empty, devoid of living beings. These elements all combine to establish a profoundly disorienting region.

People in the film do not seem to come from anywhere in particular, nor do they depart toward a specific destination. Instead, they give the impression of emerging from the landscape, and when their time in the story is complete, they are once again absorbed into the chaos. In direct opposition to this homogeneous territory exists what Eliade describes as "sacred space," which through either human or divine organization has achieved fixed points of orientation (22). In contrast to profane space, sacred space has been successfully mastered, with definite boundaries indicating where the space is and is not, subordinated through limitation.

It is on these borders between profane and sacred spaces that the clashes of world-founding take place. Eliade argues that "The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds," (25). In Ford's film, the West is presented as a frontier that is marked by the division of white settlers and Native Americans, two groups of people whose spaces are portrayed as being in direct opposition with one another. This opposition, notes Eliade, results from the notion that "An unknown, foreign, and unoccupied territory," can be one that "often means 'unoccupied by our people,'" (31). Therefore, even though the white settlers and Native Americans of the film both clearly inhabit the land of the

desert, the foreignness of the Native Americans to the white pioneers establishes a threshold between the territories each group occupies within the narrative. The threshold between profane and sacred space is one that is unstable in Ford's film, with the character Ethan Edwards continuously attempting to redefine it. Rallying against the profane space created by the homogenous landscape and the illusory presence of Native Americans, Ethan leads a symbolic campaign against the boundary of sacred and profane through the implementation of fire. The imagery of this turmoil is present in the scene in which Ethan builds a campfire with the ostensible purpose of warming Martin and himself during the night.

The imagery of fire is used to demonstrate the conflict on the threshold between the profane and the sacred through Ethan's construction of the campfire itself. The ability of a man to build a fire is a Promethean expression of the mastery of nature, in that it involves his harnessing of one of the most active and dynamic elements of the physical world. Fire can bring life or destroy it, as seen through the use of the hearth in the Edwards's home and the subsequent arson of the homestead, the two images of fire demonstrating both its capacity to sustain and to consume. Thus, Ethan takes away the exclusive ability of nature to determine the beneficiaries and victims of the flame and wields this capability as his own. By absorbing this power into his own being, Ethan asserts the limits of his physical body as restraints on the natural world, establishing a border where nature ends and man begins.

The boundary between man and nature is further challenged through the setting of the scene. It takes place at night, the two itinerants hunkered down in a clearing in the brush against the darkness and cold. As noted above, the desert is an overtly profane territory within the narrative, an idea that is particularly palpable at night, when inky blackness drips over the buttes and parched ground, creating uniform obscurity. The light of the campfire pierces this homogenous environment, creating a pinpoint of orientation. Eliade argues that "The discovery or projection of a fixed point – the center – is equivalent to the creation of a world," (22). Ethan's generation of the campfire at the literal center of their encampment thus establishes the site as a microcosm of structure within the chaos of the desert night, an island of familiarizing sacred space. Interestingly, this campfire does not code as completely beneficial, as it is the glow of the fire that allows Futterman to find and attempt to ambush the wanderers. This negative consequence of the mastery of nature indicates a conflicting treatment of the imagery of fire by Ford. The structure of sacred space does rescue territory from the homogeneity of the profane, the director's framing of the situation contends, however the organization of mastered space can result in a society that suffers from predictability and oppression, which is inherently homogenous and homogenizing as well.

The imagery of fire is also utilized to convey conflict along the threshold between the profane and sacred by serving as a physical obstacle between

Ethan and Martin. Ethan, who codes as a white settler, upholds the fundamental antagonism between white settlers and the Native Americans of the West. He believes that the white pioneers, through their construction of stationary homesteads, carve organized, sacred space from the chaotic profanity of the desert. Meanwhile, the Comanches are a migratory group, their constant and unpredictable migration and temporary camps of teepees reflecting "the fluid and larval modality of chaos" Eliade associates with the profane (31). To Ethan, there should exist a binary between white settler and Native American, to accept otherwise would be to call into question the purity of the sacred space that has been established, which in this case would jeopardize the moral authority of white settlement in the West. Eliade writes that "profane space represents absolute nonbeing," (64), and furthermore that "Religious man's desire to live in the sacred is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality...to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion," (28). The intermingling of the profane influence of Native Americans with the supposedly sacred organization of the settlers would disrupt the pioneers' racial hegemony, and would thus cause a loss of identity, a form of nonbeing. Ethan defends this racial binary by physically provoking Martin in the campfire scene. As Martin makes himself comfortable in his makeshift bed on the desert floor, Ethan heaps large branches onto the subsiding campfire he has built between them.

Martin: Do you have a feeling that maybe we're being followed?

Ethan: That's the Injun in you.

At face value, Ethan's response may appear to be nothing more than a bigoted dismissal. However, Martin has established that he is, in fact, "an eighth Cherokee." Thus, Ethan's remark affirms his unwillingness to accept a racial spectrum. In Ethan's eyes, an eighth Cherokee carries the same threat to white hegemony as a pureblood Native American. Even Ford seems to struggle with how to identify Martin; it is not clear whether or not the character should be read as white or not. Born with Cherokee heritage, he is conspicuously 'other' from the Edwards family, and yet they adopt and raise him as their own son. The situation is further complicated with the implication that Martin could be Ethan's son, given the veteran's suspiciously vague claim that he found Martin "under a sage clump." If Martin has Native American lineage, but is the son of white settler, then Ethan has participated in the racial blending he claims to despise. Furthermore, at the end of the film, Martin is poised to marry Laurie Jorgensen, who expresses prejudiced disdain for Native Americans. Additionally, Ethan appears to be fine with, or least ambivalent about, the relationship despite the implied mixing of races. Nevertheless, both Ethan and Ford assert the foreignness of Martin's presence to Ethan in the campfire scene. Plotting to use the sleeping Martin as bait for Futterman, Ethan hurls more logs onto the fire, causing hot embers to spill uncomfortably close to Martin.

Martin: Oh, come on, now, Ethan, don't put any more wood on the fire! I'm burning up.

Ethan: Comfortable?

...

Martin: You went and built up the fire, you fixed it so I could get my brains blowed [sic] out! What if you had missed?

Ethan: Never occurred to me.

Here the fire is the boundary between Ethan and Martin, representing to Ethan the threshold between the sacred space he inhabits and the profane space in which Martin, as the 'other,' resides. The Confederate veteran fuels that border, wielding his civilized ability to harness fire and literally pushing the burning threshold towards Martin. Martin's complaint that he's "burning up" demonstrates Native American opposition to the tireless progression of white dominance across the territory. "Comfortable?" Ethan taunts, knowing full well that his perceived adversary is flinching against the attack. He wants Martin, and by extension the Native Americans, to be uncomfortable, to feel the heat of the white march across the continent, to recognize the power they wield, and to submit. Moreover, the movie's hero implies that the lives of the Native Americans matter very little to him; he is determined to protect the space founded by the white pioneers without concern of causing injury to anyone who exists outside of 'his people.' Ford seems comfortable with this assertion of white structured space. It is, after all, Ethan's strengthening of the fire that saves the two men from ambush. "Come on, let's get out of here," Ethan calls to Martin after shooting Futterman and his henchmen, indicating that the fire has served its purpose for the night.

Eliade notes the Vedic Hindu belief that "By the erection of a fire altar Agni is made present, and communication with the gods is ensured; the space of the altar becomes a sacred space," (30).

Although Ethan Edwards's erection of a campfire does institute a sacred space, it lacks the element of attempting to communicate with a higher deity. In fact, there is substantial evidence that Ethan is not a man of particular faith. "There's no more time for praying," he bellows to end the funeral of his late brother's family. Nevertheless, Eliade claims that "to organize space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods," (32) because in doing so one must "create his own world and assume the responsibility of maintaining and renewing it," (56). Thus, Ethan's campfire does indeed reflect the presence of a deity, its representation of Ethan's desire to found and maintain an organized world indicating that the divine presence is Ethan himself. By navigating through the harsh wilderness, creating sacred space through his mastery of the land and the people he decides to save or shoot, Ethan sees himself as a divine worldbuilder, one who decides how large the cosmos he protects will be and who will be incorporated. Like the Christian God, Ethan forms a world that he himself does not reside in, evident in his choice not to step over the threshold into the Jorgensen household and to instead dissolve into the desert at the end of the film. Such a decision parallels the manner in which a god contributes to the construction of the physical world but maintains an element of formlessness outside of the space created. "There's no more time for praying," Ethan shouts, because to him there is no need to worship a higher deity; this self-made being already wields all the power he needs to master his world.

Drew Sharp and Spooge Jr.: Why You Shouldn't Kill a Bug on Petulant Impulse

Ande Edmunds

In his final chapter of The Real American Dream, titled "Self," Delbanco presents an image of the United States as facing present and proleptic hopelessness without a substantial solution or any clear direction towards one. Delbanco describes such hopelessness as "postmodern melancholy," a condition whose main cause is the widespread adoption of consumerism as a futile substitute for filling the void left by the decline of religion. Symptoms of the condition present themselves as a general "ache for meaning" among Americans dissatisfied with their own self-involvement and recursive pursuit of instant gratification as an unsuitable means to achieving longterm happiness (107). In a typical case of a solution disguising itself as a problem, Delbanco's prescription for "the modern self" who "feels…more and more cut off from anything substantial or enduring," is to find remedy outside oneself in the service of others. Vince Gilligan's Breaking Bad presents a microcosm of Delbanco's caricature of the nation, where characters who scramble for wealth are enduringly unhappy and misclassify potential solutions as obstacles to be overcome. Children in Breaking Bad represent a poignant example of this concept, wherein their presence frequently confronts characters with moral conflicts regarding the worthiness of their pursuit of profit and their own integrity. The show achieves this by drawing a metaphorical comparison between children and bugs, regarded as collateral in the pursuit of wealth.

tChildren are essentially a tool to pique audience sensitivity in trying to highlight characters' corruption and the consequences of unchecked greed. Jesse's treatment of children challenges the notion of their being pests, such that his acute sympathy for them suggests his own understanding of the danger of devotion to wealth before devotion to others. Breaking Bad employs the symbolization of children as pests and counters it through Jesse as an expository measure to reveal the danger of avariciousness and the pursuit of wealth, which Delbanco warns is no remedy for melancholy.

The haunting portrayal of Drew Sharp's death in Season 5, Episode 5 "Dead Freight" encapsulates the show's evocative use of children to indicate the amorality of characters' with blind devotion to money. Season 5, Episode 5 "Dead Freight" opens with young Drew Sharp, unnamed at this time, riding through the desert on a dirt bike across the beautiful, open landscape until curiosity about something in his path prompts him to stop. Drew slowly approaches what has piqued his interest, which turns out to be a tarantula that he delicately allows to scurry onto his hand. Rather than shying away from it or trying to kill what most would consider a frightening pest, Drew slides the creature into a mason jar, examines it momentarily, and tucks it into his jacket for safekeeping. He then hears the sound of a freight train in the distance, foreshadowing the ending, and lets his curiosity direct him again as he rides

off towards it. The opening deliberately aligns children with bugs to set up an audience association between the two, but one in which a tarantula is something to be saved and preserved rather than destroyed. The scene is powerful in garnering audience perception of Drew in a short amount of time before his next and final appearance. He can swiftly be characterized as adventurous, curious, and unencumbered by fear of the spider — qualities that adults often admire in children as familiar but, in some cases, forlorn qualities they once held themselves. The opening is just enough to make his sudden death at the end of the episode that much more chilling. In the final scene, Walt, Jesse, and Todd laugh, jump, and pat each other on the back like children in celebration of a successful methylamine heist. Suddenly, the three grow silent in response to seeing something out of the frame, revealed to be the boy from the opening on his bike who has accidentally stumbled upon the crime scene. Drew waves unassumingly to the trio who look worried as they begin to process that he is a witness. Without hesitation, Todd picks up his gun and shoots the boy who falls dead from his bike before the camera cuts to the spider crawling around in the jar.

Drew Sharp's death and close comparison to the tarantula represents a horrific and extreme manifestation of Delbanco's concerns about Americans' general loss of their ability to extend themselves beyond their own personal affairs and profit seeking endeavors. In "Self," Delbanco writes that "the drive for money… has always been a creative as well as a corrosive force in American life" (113). Walt's ingenious creativity in designing the heist is undeniable, proving that money can act as a motivator for using one's expertise in innovative ways. However, protecting that money-inspired, albeit creative, robbery came at the expense of Drew Sharp's life, which displays the finitude of the line between the creativity and corrosion of monetary purpose. The scene is ripe with emotion as each character is forced to look inward in a matter of seconds and reflect on the worth of the task they have just executed and the money it will generate versus the worth of a human life. To the objective viewer, the two are incomparable, but Todd's immediate reaction indicates his ability to treat a child as a mere obstacle to be overcome in the name of his team's grand scheme of wealth. The significance of Todd's instantaneous determination of Drew's life as worth less than his fortune to come is illustrated by the final shot where a live, crawling bug scrambles around next to a still, lifeless Drew. The shot aptly suggests that the child has not only been treated as a pest, but as less than such, and the same care that Drew provided the spider has not been reciprocated to him in a reaction with another human. The scene is a jarring example of the immoral acts that one can excuse when his or her higher power is money. Even having written his book before the turn of the century, Delbanco wrote that Americans are "entitled, indeed obliged, to wonder whether in all our history there has ever been such a frenzy for money on such a scale as there is today" (113). The violence committed against Drew Sharp in this episode, and similar acts in the show at large, urge a serious reconsideration of the dire consequences and irreversible subversion of morality that stems from the American craze for wealth.

Season 5, Episode 6 "Buyout" covers the aftermath of Drew's death, where Walt, Jesse, Mike, and Todd mull over the repercussions of the murder in a manner that is, in some ways, more unsettling to watch than the act itself. "I was thinking on my feet," says Todd, defending his actions to the group, "I saw a threat and I took care of it the only way that I could." Todd's language here, referring to the boy as an "it" equates his death to the extermination of a pest. Moreover, while he explains the murder in these disturbingly crass terms, two posters of diagrams of different bug species loom behind him on the wall, furthering the association between children and bugs. Todd's allegiance to the mission above sparing Drew's life exhibits the kind of fixation with efficiency in the workplace that Mark C. Taylor details in his piece, "Time Counts." In tracing this obsession with efficiency, as a function of an obsession with making money, back to the Industrial Revolution through to the present day, Taylor concludes that, for Americans, "faster is always better, and the best way to become more efficient and get faster is by cutting out the fat" (86). There is no room for morality in Todd's logical understanding of the events that transpired. For him, Drew was merely a "fat" to be cut in order to complete the task at hand, and his intense commitment to money far surpasses any commitment he may have to upholding human decency. Todd reiterates this sentiment to Walt as a justification for the murder when he says, "I just want to make sure that you know that my priority is this business." Jesse has different priorities and works to steer the group away from a strategic, business discussion to one of humanity, vehemently reminding Todd, "the kid was waving at us. He wasn't going anywhere. He was saying hi. He didn't know what he'd seen." Unfortunately, Todd's argument ultimately holds more weight in its presentation to management corrupted by the same preoccupation with money. This scene shows how Jesse operates as the personification of a moralistic opposition to the money hungry greed that enables the people around him to justify the murder of a child by imagining him to be no more than a bug.

Unfortunately for Jesse, this was not the first time his involvement with Walt and the meth business intersected with dreadfully, grim circumstances involving an innocent child, but his own reaction to an unexpected encounter he had with Spooge's son differed starkly from that of Todd's with Drew. Season 2, Episode 6 "Peakaboo," where Jesse stumbles upon Spooge's young son while on his way to retrieve stolen money, begins in a very similar fashion to "Dead Freight." It opens with a far away shot of Jesse on a sidewalk and a train passing by in front of him before it cuts closer to him as the sound of the train echoes in the background. Jesse is looking down at his foot where he watches a black beetle crawl by and then reaches down to get a closer look. Like Drew, he does not kill the bug, but rather delicately lets it pass over his hand and even smiles with a similar childlike curiosity. The shot films Jesse from below, putting viewers in the position of the beetle. Skinny Pete arrives and immediately crushes the bug with his foot, and then gives Spooge's name and address so that Jesse can hunt down his stolen product and money. Later that episode, Jesse arrives at the

house and breaks into a nasty, filth ridden living room. He sits down on the couch and a small toddler covered in dirt comes out from a bedroom and crosses over the trash coated floor to turn on the TV and sit down on the couch. The boy nonchalantly disregards Jesse, suggesting that he is used to strange people coming in and out. The TV plays an infomercial special on a knife set, which turns out to be the only channel that the boy has access to after Jesse tries to change it for him. The scene changes and cuts back later to the two at the kitchen table, where Jesse has made the boy a marshmallow fluff sandwich. The telemarketing channel is still playing in the background and the quiet noise of a fly buzzing by can be heard. Jesse does not regard the boy as a pest though, and tries to comfort him by playing peekaboo. When the boy's parents arrive home, Jesse immediately brings him to the bedroom and tells him to stay there in an effort to protect him from witnessing a potentially violent, disturbing interaction. At one point, Jesse checks back in on him and finds the boy asleep with a plastic tarantula toy laid down next to him, suggesting a deliberate connection between the boy and Drew Sharp. At the end of the episode, after the boy's mother kills his father and then becomes immobilized from taking a drug, Jesse hurries to flee the scene, but remembers the boy in the bedroom. He calls 911 and leaves the phone off the hook, then grabs the boy and leaves him outside of his home wrapped in a blanket comforting him by saying, "hey, look at me. You wait right here. Okay? It's just part of the game… Just don't go back inside. All right?" Jesse then wishes the child the best and tells him, "you have a good rest of your life, kid," thus ending perhaps the most difficult to watch episode of the show.

The logistics of the two episodes are similar in that both Jesse and Todd are carrying out missions for Walt that will ultimately secure them financial benefit, but children, metaphorically conflated with bug imagery and sounds, unexpectedly test the integrity of those missions. In his chapter, "Self," Delbanco locates the nation's hopelessness as visible through the lens of children as an indication of America's need for a revitalization "in the realm of narrative and symbol" where "we are deprived" (107). Delbanco laments the misguided trajectory of the nation as both evident in and most harmful to children and writes that the free American individual is "marooned in a perpetual present, playing along with its trinkets and baubles" and that "it is especially disheartening to see this process far advanced in a child" (106). Even amidst all of the trash in his home and neglect from his drug addicted parents, Jesse seems specifically saddened by the boy being trapped in a loop of advertisements on his broken TV. It is powerfully and tragically ironic that the toddler who has nothing and endures terrible living conditions is suffering through perpetual product promotion as his sole source of entertainment. Children are an effective vehicle in Breaking Bad for highlighting the corrupt pursuit of wealth at the expense of the innocent in the same way that children are indicative of an unhealthy America to Delbanco. Putting words to this sentiment, Delbanco writes, "nothing it seems to me, is more alarming than the impoverishment of our children's capacity to imagine the future" (98). Jesse essentially feels about Spooge's son the way Delbanco feels about the nation — that misguidance and lack of

a proper narrative or symbols of hope for the future to latch on to render both unable to pull themselves out of their situations.

Both Jesse's confrontation with Spooge's son and Todd's with Drew place the characters' obligations to people in vulnerable positions and to their commercialistic endeavors at odds with one another. Todd easily prioritizes the latter obligation, opting for the pursuit of wealth as a worthy enough cause to forget his wrongdoings, a tendency that Delbanco fears America at large leans toward. Jesse struggles more when confronted with Spooge's son, an innocent toddler who has grown up in poverty and endured an unimaginably low quality of life, while literally in the pursuit of riches for himself and his boss. Jesse is naturally more empathetic and more often finds purpose in tending to others than he does happiness through his turbulent quest for monetary gain. In the same way that children operate as a vehicle in the show for prompting characters to reevaluate their purpose, so too do they provide Delbanco with a key point in his argument for the shortcomings and opportunities for change in the nation. Children are a dependent and virtually defenseless population who represent hope for the future and whose success and happiness can serve as a direct barometer of the capability of a nation to nurture and socialize its people. Thus, Jesse and Todd's treatment of members of this defenseless population whom they do not know mirrors their differing levels of intuitive awareness of Delbanco's warning that "if we fail to contribute to some good beyond ourselves, we condemn ourselves to the hell of loneliness" (117).

Through Drew Sharp and Spooge's son's characters, Breaking Bad seems to urge viewers not only to reassess their treatment of others in general but also toward those whom helping means enduring an inconvenience. In other words, it suggests that integrity is not only defined by what one does when nobody is watching but also by what a person does for someone who can bring no benefit to them and can even put them at a disadvantage. In the same convoluted way that reading the show through the lens of Delbanco's chapter "Self" encourages the treatment of an obstacle as a solution, children are both emblematic of the nation's need for greater meaning and similarly its best hope for changing that. Delbanco mourns children growing up in a cultural landscape starved for a total reconstruction of its symbols and narrative: "Growing up without exemplars of self-discipline, without fluency in the ways of the larger culture or the skills requisite for success in the modern marketplace, how dare these children harbor hope for the future?" (111). He puts the onus on adults and directs readers to see children as motivation to change the nation's course. If America could see children as its supremely important, unassuming, and absorbent audience of stakeholders, perhaps the country would empower its actors to villify money and present messages of service and humility as the highest of aspirations. Perhaps, Breaking Bad is modeling this, with Jesse as the unconventional hero, Walt as the villain, and pests recast as the population worth saving.

Warring Religions: Machine vs. Garden Worship in Mad Max: Fury Road and Beyond

Anna Miller

Through its sentimental guise, "the pastoral ideal remained of service long after the machine's appearance in the landscape. It enabled the nation to continue: defining its purpose as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth, and power. It remained for our serious writers to discover the meaning inherent in the contradiction" (226).

—Leo Marx, "The Machine in the Garden"

"I can't even imagine what this place would look like, with these huge pits and the sulfuric acid burning and all the water being taken. You know, that affects not only us," it affects the animals
and plants too.

—Daranda Hinkey, Paiute-Shoshone Tribe

"We are going to great lengths to make sure that the environment is protected, and that we're being responsible. And we're also going to great lengths to make sure that any historic artifacts
are preserved and treated appropriately"

` —Tim Crowley, V.P. Govt. Affairs/Community Rel. Lithium Nevada

From the locomotive, to the car, to the cell tower, to the cell phone, humans have long struggled with how to integrate these new and incredibly useful technologies into the natural world. Complicated by the fact that nearly every new machine or technology seems to come at some sort of cost to nature, an inherent dilemma — regarding what to prioritize, technological innovation (machine) or environmental protection (garden) — has been created. In the north-east Nevada desert, this dilemma has reemerged at a site called Thacker Pass. Located adjacent to the Fort McDermitt Paiute-Shoshone Tribes of the Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation, it is the ancestral home of the Paiute and Shoshone people and includes sacred burial sites and wildlife (The Guardian, 2021). Concurrently, the site is the host of the largest known sedimentary deposit in the United States for lithium, the essential ingredient for the production of electric car and electric power grid batteries. While Nevada Lithium Corporation is currently set to mine the site, the Paiute and Shoshone people, with the help of neighboring tribes, are determined to protest the mine to protect their home and their way of life.

In Mad Max: Fury Road, this same dilemma is dramatized by placing Machine and Garden in conflict with one another. Set in a world defined by environmental catastrophe and resource

scarcity, characters deal with their reality by dividing themselves into two theological camps. In one, Immortan Joe, informed by a sense of injured innocence, leads his War Boys to embrace technology. Cars, guns, and other kinds of machinery are worshipped as holy objects and used to exert control over the natural world and its resources. In the other, Furiosa leads her ever growing flock toward salvation in "the green place," where seeds, water, motherhood, and other natural phenomena are worshipped as holy objects in need of defending. While these two theologies seem to be hopelessly at odds with one another, Mad Max: Fury Road sets out to "discover the meaning inherent" in their "contradiction," by challenging viewers to imagine an ideal world in which technology and nature work together in harmony, not competition. Through her journey on the fury road, Furiosa proves a symbiotic relationship, rather than a parasitic one, can exist between Machine and Garden.

Like the algorithms in our computers, machines in the physical world attempt to control the uncontrollable, and they are praised for their ability to increase productivity and reduce drag.[1] Accordingly, Immortan Joe's sect of machine worship is ultimately one rooted in mastery. With tricked out hot rods, trucks, and muscle cars as their iron horses (e.g., Figure 1), Immortan Joe and his War Boys use their vehicles to dominate the desert landscape. Cars in particular, like locomotives, elevate their passengers to a feeling of divinity, as they allow those driving to experience an otherworldly "annihilation of space and time" (Kirby, 28). Their holiness is echoed by the ways the characters' vernacular centers around cars. To introduce Immortan Joe to the common people, his aids instruct the audience to "rev it up!;" to describe how his War Boys will be redeemed, Immortan Joe explains how they will "ride" with him eternal on the "highways of Valhalla;" and finally, frequent use of phrases such as "fang it," and "thunder up!" meaning, to "floor it," allude to the centrality of driving (and driving fast) to the film. Moreover, it is through the use of cars that the War Boys are able to fight on behalf of Immortan Joe, who they praise as their redeemer, believing him to be the only one able to deliver them to Valhalla in the afterlife. As such, the War Boys come to view their steering wheels — the reins to their iron horses — as their most prized possessions, and treat them accordingly, as holy objects.

Before setting out on the fury road, Nux's accompanying War Boy, Slit, holds his hands in an interlocking, V-like fashion up toward the Citadel's steering wheel rack [3], which takes on the look of a religious monument (e.g., Figure 3). He then recites his creed: "by my deeds I honor him. V-8," before grabbing his steering wheel and setting off after the war rig. In the background, other War Boys continue to chant, "V-8! in reference to V8 engines, which are known for their ability to create lots and lots of horsepower [4]. Once on the road, Nux disconnects his steering

1 Cars, like algorithms, are praised for their ability to move fast and break things.
2 While cattle are the unconscious of the traditional western, cars and car-speak are the subconscious of Mad Max: Fury Road's revisionary western story.
3 For lack of a better word, the steering wheel "rack" refers to the sculpture-like tangle of rods and poles that store the steering wheels, which can be slid on and off.
4 V8 engines produce lots of horsepower, but what is more unique is their ability to generate a lot of power efficiently, due to their light and compact nature. This characteristic elevates the car to a greater level as a tool for mastery — a compact, yet powerful iron horse.

wheel, lifts it through the car's sunroof up toward the sky, and yells, "Immortan!" before slamming his foot down on the gas pedal. These acts exemplify the ways in which the steering wheel is a beloved symbol of the War Boys' mechanical theology. However, what is even more notable is how the steering wheel relates to mastery. While the car allows its driver to exert control over the landscape, the steering wheel allows the driver to exert control over the car. This concept is what truly makes it an essential fixture of Machine Worship [5].

While Immortan Joe and the War Boys' Machine Worship is characterized by mastery, it is ultimately informed by a sense of injured innocence. In her chapter, "Empire of Innocence," Patricia Limerick uses the Christian missionary Narcissa Whitman to exemplify how the concept of injured innocence has persisted in the Western myth by placing emphasis on innocence of intentions, rather than guilt for outcomes. Believing it to be her divine calling, Whitman embarked on a journey west to offer salvation to the Native Americans (whom she referred to as, "heathens") in Oregon country. However, by 1847, just 12 years after Whitman set out on her journey, the Native Cayuse people were devastated by measles. "It was an Indian conviction that disease was 'the result of either malevolence or spiritual transgression;' either way the evidence pointed at the missionaries" (Limerick, 40-41). Accordingly, the Cayuses turned on Whitman and her fellow missionaries — in a spiritually informed act of self-defense, she was murdered.

While Whitman's story is one of "melancholy," it is, "on the whole predictable" (Limerick, 41). Ultimately, despite her innocent intentions, she was an "intolerant invader" of the Cayuse people. Her quest served personal moral interests, and she was emboldened by the belief that, by spreading Christianity and the western way of life, she was simultaneously serving the interests of the nation. However, her innocence of intent was weakened by her ignorance of Cayuse culture, religion, and social networks. While she was not a villain, she wasn't the innocent victim many claimed her to be either.

While the viewer recognizes Immortan Joe's oppressive rule as anything but innocent, like Narcissa Whitman, he believes his actions to be justified on the basis of religious rationale. From over extracting Earth's limited resources to enslaving women to serve him as "breeders," Immortan Joe justifies his actions under Machine Worship, which encourages any action that may help him accrue more power, increase productivity, and/or better master nature. Moreover, one could argue the War Boys act innocently in the name of their religion. Likening them to missionaries — who, instead of spreading Christianity, spread Machine Worship to the Citadel's common folk — the War Boys serve Immortan Joe for their own self-interest (to be received in Valhalla) and for an ill-informed, yet genuine belief that their actions are for the good of the nation. After all, Immortan Joe is the only ruler they

5. It is notable that Tesla, the world's leading electric car company, recently released the new Model S Plaid, featuring a strange "yoke" steering wheel. Interestingly enough, this special attention paid to steering wheel design was to better accommodate the car's self-driving mode. This development begs the question: do self-driving cars sacrifice the driver's sense of mastery, or does the technological feat transform the car into an even more masterful machine?

know, and he controls the resources needed to sustain the Citadel and its people [6]. The War Boys' innocence of intent is reinforced by their persistent belief that Immortan Joe is their divine savior. In one instance, the wives try to explain to Nux how he has been fooled, but he maintains that it is by Immortan Joe's hand that they "will be lifted up." He then makes the vague claim, "we are not to blame," to which Splendid responds by asking, "then who killed the world?" [7].

While Narcissa Whitman's innocence was undermined by the hardship she caused for the Cayuse people, In Mad Max: Fury Road, Immortan Joe and the War Boys' innocence is undermined by the ways their extraction-based religion has led to the state of their world. While we don't know for certain how the film's post-apocalyptic reality came to be, it is reasonable to believe Machine Worship played a large role in killing the world. Given the atrocities committed by Immortan Joe and his War Boys, resistance to their rule and their theology was, "on the whole predictable" (Limerick, 41). Just as the Cayuses turned on Whitman and her fellow missionaries, Furiosa and the wives turn on Immortan Joe. Opposed to his extraction and control-based theology, they flee the Citadel in a spiritually informed act of self-defense. Upon learning of his wives' escape and Furiosa's betrayal, Immortan Joe's shock and outrage expose his sense of injured innocence. Because he feels so justified in his actions, he "considers himself entitled to reap their benefits [8]. As such, the resulting injury — the loss of his wives — feels unjust, "inexplicable, undeserved, and arbitrary" (Limerick, 42). Under the guise of such injured innocence, in which, "the ends abundantly justify the means" (Limerick, 36), a negative feedback loop is ignited. Rather than see the error of his domineering ways, Immortan Joe becomes increasingly frustrated. For rulers like him, "It (is) second nature to see misfortune as the doings of an outside force." "Preying on innocence and vulnerability, refusing to play by the rules of fairness," (Limerick, 47) he acts out his frustrations by engaging the same domineering approach that created his problems in the first place. And so, the high-speed chase ensues and the extraction of guzzoline and harvesting of bullets at the bullet farm continue [9].

Mirroring Immortan Joe's injured innocence is the Nevada Lithium Corporation. Claiming innocent intentions, the corporation argues their proposed lithium mine is necessary to spark the manufacturing of electric batteries necessary to combat climate change. Despite the fact that Native ancestral lands will be destroyed, proponents for the mine argue it will be beneficial to all — not only because of its role in creating clean energy, but also for the coveted skilled jobs it will provide for the community. Despite their seemingly innocent intentions, they are ultimately a mining

6 Immortan Joe's all-becoming persona codes him as a God-like figure. As such, the War Boys feel it is their divine calling to spread his word

7 While innocent in their intentions to serve their religious leader, the War Boys, like Narcissa Whitman, are ultimately intolerant invaders. Their innocence was undermined by their ignorance of the ways their actions were killing the world.

8 (E.g. White Privilege)

9 Immortan Joe uses machines to subdue nature, his wives, and even his own body. Considering the numerous machines he hooked up to, and the mechanized body plates that protect his skin, his own health is dependent on machines (e.g., Figure 4). Metaphorically speaking, his power rests solely on his ability to control resources, which would not be possible without the use of heavy-duty machinery and transport vehicles. The high stakes he has riding on what Machine Worship provides him add to his sense of injured innocence.

corporation interested in making a profit. According to Limerick, historically, "Land and natural resources to the Anglo-American mind, were meant for development," so, "when the Indians held control, the excluded whites took up the familiar role of injured innocents. The West, in the most common figure of speech, had to be 'opened' — a metaphor based on the assumption that the virgin West was 'closed'," locked up, held captive by Indians" (46) [10].

While the injured innocence informing Immortan Joe, the War Boys, and Nevada Lithium Corporation's Machine Worship paints nature as a counter-productive, oppositional force, Garden worship takes the opposite approach. Rather than view nature as something to conquer, Furiosa, the wives, the Vuvalini, and the rest of the flock [11], see nature (and themselves, being extensions of nature) as something to be nurtured and defended. As such, it is fitting that seeds are among the religion's most holy objects. Vulnerable if left unprotected, but powerful when properly nurtured, a seed's power lies in its ability to grow, change, and adapt to challenges [12]. The Vuvalini's Keeper of the Seeds recognizes this power and is insistent about protecting the remaining seeds at all costs, eventually passing along the responsibility to The Dag [13].

In addition to physical seeds, the Garden Worshippers view pregnancy as the most divine phenomena in nature [14]. Given how, "the American landscape has traditionally had strong associations with the female body" (Wexman, 109), Garden Worshippers understandably view motherhood as the sacred link between the human body and the Earth. Like bodily worship, Garden worship is ultimately rooted in the real world — the natural and the human. In *Mad Max Fury Road*, "as in Genesis, the physical world comes first. The only difference is that instead of being created by God, it is God" (Tompkins, 70). Accordingly, we often see Furiosa and other Garden Worshippers turn to nature, their God, for help on their journey to "the Green Place."

In several crucial moments throughout the film, nature is used to help the war rig escape capture. Most notably, by driving directly into the sandstorm, Furiosa uses the unruly power of the elements to her benefit and is able to temporarily evade the War Boys. Moreover, when the war rig gets stuck in the mud, the Garden Worshippers look to a nearby tree for help [15]. Using the trunk for leverage, they are able to free themselves and escape the bullet farmer on their tail. Finally, following a grenade attack by the Rock Riders that sets the front half of the war rig on fire, Furiosa looks to nature for guidance and lowers the bumper of the war rig, kicking up enough sand to smother the fire and keep them on their journey.

10 Lithium, by its nature is a "feisty" element in need of mastering. "On its own it's erratic, always wanting to give up an electron and take on a charge." As such, "it must remain under seal; the briefest contact with water or humid air will cause it to combust in a popping, sparking flame. These qualities also make it a perfect material for batteries, which are about taming the ephemeral—a spark, a flame—and bottling it up for later."

11 Throughout the film, Furiosa exemplifies a Pastoral power, while Immortan Joe exemplifies a Cynegetic one. "The former, a conquering Hunter, glorifies himself, carried away by the passion for domination, while the latter, a humble shepherd, glories only in his obedience to the Lord and his devotion to his flock" (Chamayou, 14).

12 A seed's power to grow parallel's the wives' power to escape Immortan Joe and his attempts to master them.

13 Passing down the seeds represents Mad Max: Fury Road's revision of the traditional Western's emphasis on legacy.

14 Under machine worship, pregnancy is objectified and worse, commodified. By capitalizing on an act as sacrosanct as pregnancy, mmortan Joe triggers a response. Unlike the injured innocence informing machine worship, those acting under Garden worship feel a justifiable sense of victimhood.

15 The "tree thing" was unidentifiable to Nux, proving how deeply indoctrinated into Machine Worship he was.

Rather than work against nature, Garden Worshippers see the value in working *with* nature [16]. While Furiosa is devout in her Garden faith, she also has the unique ability to bring technology and nature together in a, "perfect marriage of the spiritual and the industrial'' (Kirby, 26). Such a marriage is exemplified by her ability to reclaim the war rig — a highly mechanized vehicle made for mastering the elements — into a family-oriented, locomotive-like unit. A more obvious example is her prosthetic arm, which serves as a model for how machine and nature can work together in harmony toward an objective good. Furiosa's ability to break the binary between Machine Worship and Garden Worship [17] is important because it allows viewers to catch a glimpse — albeit a fleeting one — of a world in which Machine can fuse with Garden in a symbiotic, rather than parasitic way. As one of the many "serious writers of our time," George Miller uses this film to find the "meaning inherent in the contradiction" between America's supposed appreciation for nature and its ultimate prioritization of profits.

In the ongoing case of Thacker Pass, there is still hope that Machine won't overtake Garden. While the issue seems like a binary one — mine, or don't mine — there are more options. The notable "third" in this case is known as urban mining, a process in which existing lithium-ion batteries are harvested from communities and recycled into new products to put back into the market. Without serious consideration of this third, the American contradiction will continue. All the while, demand for lithium will continue to rise, and 79% of the lithium in the United States will remain located within 35 miles of Native American reservations (The Guardian, 2021).

16 While the traditional Western associates strong ties to the Earth with an unhealthy attachment to the mother and perverse human development (Wexman, 105), Mad Max: Fury Road flips this trope by branding the most primitive characters, the War Boys, as those most isolated from mother earth; meanwhile branding the most humane characters, the wives, as those closest to mother earth.

17 Furiosa's ability to break the binary between Machine and Garden worship is just one of many ways in which she represents "the third."

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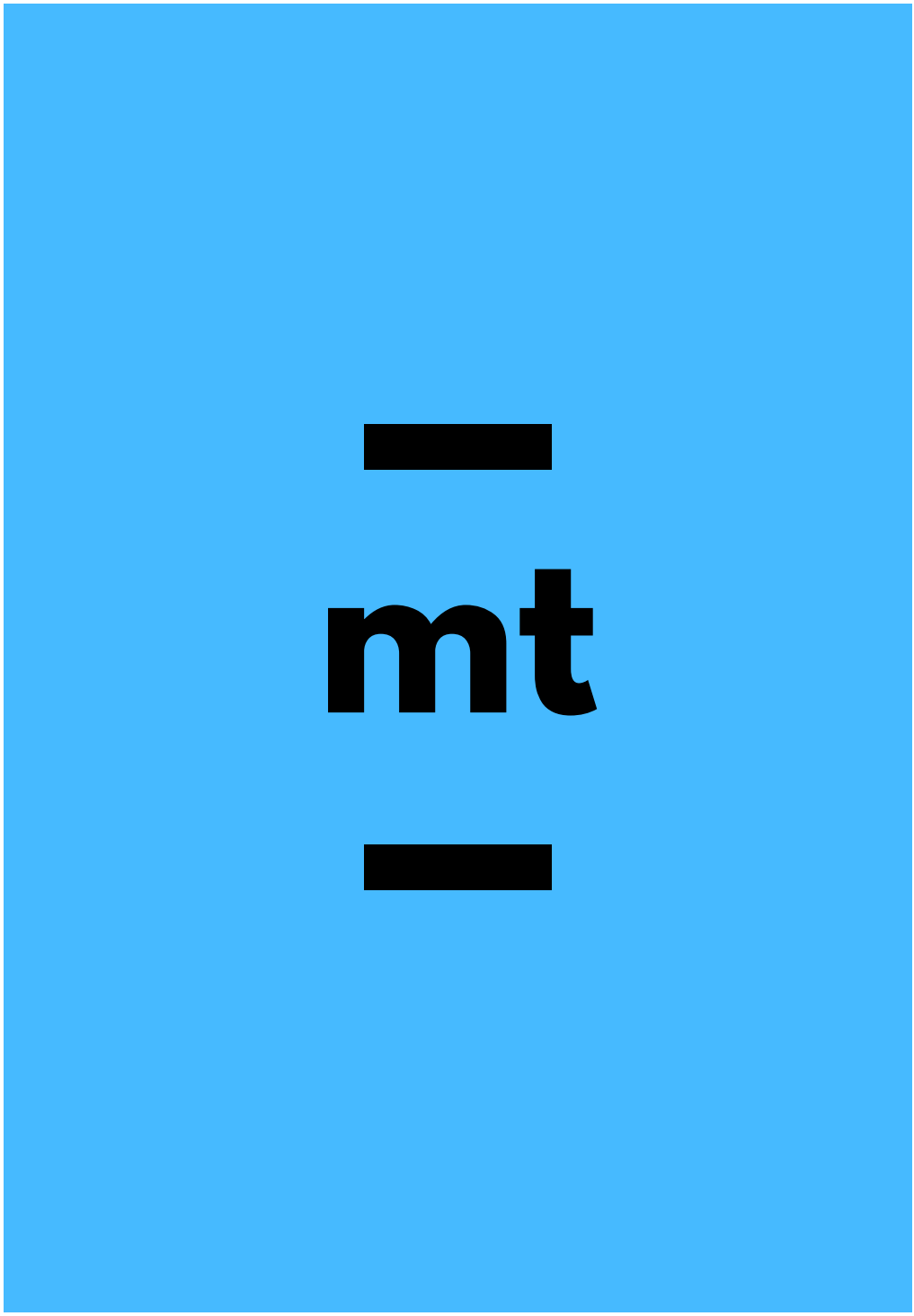
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