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Content

Art, Big Dipper

Béla Dániel, Where does our love for trash movies come from? 4

Helena Santidrián Mas, The iconography of Santiago Matamoros in Compostela. A Paradox. 7

Serpens, Science

Lillian Clark, Herbal Medicine: How effective is it? 16

Phoenix, Literature & Philosophy

Emma Gabor, The Search for Genius 'The works and genius of André Aciman' 19

Orion, Business

Alex Rednaxela, Trusting Bitcoin in a Trustless World?Aciman' 24

Centaurus, Social Commentary

Anja Radonjic, Where am "I" in identity? 29

Barbara Ning Balint, Can you change the opinion of the masses in one night? 32

Sunset Gunther, Being conscious in the metaverse 36

Draco, Causes We Care About

Elizabeth Rose, Born this way? Considering asexual erasure and essentialism 38

Elizabeth Rose, Birth & Origins, Mother Earth and Intersectional Environmentalism: Why we need to stop being material girls in a material world now! 44

Zsófi Lázár, Sapphic Origins: Sappho of Lesbos as an example of Queer Cultural Memory 51



Béla Dániel

edited by
Anna Mladentseva

Where does our love for trash movies come from? *The Room, Birdemic and other classics*

The Room, Battlefield Earth and Birdemic. These movies are simply just bad, but (or precisely because of this) we still enjoy them. Are they merely our guilty pleasure or is there something more unexplainable at stake? In this article, I will inquire into the complex and paradoxical nature of our love for really bad movies, in order to discover its very origins.

12 Angry Men, Her, Reservoir Dogs, and of course, *The Room*. What do these movies have in common? Well, they are all part of "the cult." Not necessarily the same cult, but a cult nonetheless. But how?

People visit the cinema with different aims. Some people want to experience the Ancient Greek catharsis, some people want to have an easy, unsurprising rom-com, some people really want those art house, mind-boggling pieces. There is no shame in loving these, although they do not come from schools of high standards. So in terms of the rom-coms, what is it that makes them so utterly enticing for many? *Why can't we just stop watching Love Actually, Bridget Jones or Notting Hill over and over again?*

For indeed, these are the types of movies where, after the first half an hour, you can guess who will kiss who and who isn't getting the wedding ring. In fact, there is no surprise element, although after a tiring day, if you want to relax, you will still (or especially because you want to relax) choose to watch a rom-com. There is no shame in this, nonetheless, let us call these rom-coms "guilty pleasure movies." Guilty, because you know it's that kind of movie, yet it still turns your mind off.

From a more sophisticated perspective, these are not real art pieces, as they are copies of good movies. But they are not *that* bad. The actors are real actors, supported by professional directors, producers and cameramen behind the scenes. Therefore, the question is: will there be a cult around some of these? Probably not. But what about movies which are copies of other copied movies?

Yes, these movies are as far from movies as the earth is from the moon., (Exactly 384 400 km!) Thus, the following inquiry is inevitable: if these movies are so

bad, then why are they known worldwide? Why do we, and how *can* we adore something that is so terribly “lame”?

One study found a correlation between higher intelligence and really bad movies (Sarkhosh and Menninghaus, 2016). In these cases, the audience sits in for the movie with a sarcastic attitude, which creates a really unique experience. Hence, the viewer goes into the movie with a different kind of expectation, than to a classic Hollywood film.

The experience here is something that cannot be achieved with other movies and the banality of it all is absolutely refreshing, and to be fair, hilarious. If you’ve ever taken part in a screening of *The Room*, you would know what I’m talking about. **Shouting with Tommy Wiseau: *You are tearing me apart, Lisa!* is the ultimate pleasure.**

The love for the exceptionally bad is a habit that exists only in the world of movies. One could argue that the same tendency is unknown to the world of music, art pieces or any other forms of entertainment. (Maybe I’m exaggerating, but just hear me out). Name an absolutely horrible but famous band? See? There isn’t. (*Okay, maybe The Shaggs, check them out!*) But with movies, somehow it works. If it isn’t meant to be bad, however it comes out as such, a huge number of people will still enjoy it. The social bonding around these films is unforeseen.

On the other hand we are aware of many art pieces which were originally meant to be disgusting, bad or even horrifying. Serrano’s *Piss Christ* photograph or Manzoni’s *Artist’s Shit* cans are well-known all around the world and the love for these pieces are undeniable. The difference between those imperfect movies and the mentioned art pieces is the intention of the artist. Is it a well thought through concept or is it just how it ended up being? The intention is different; however, the fanaticism of the audience is the same.

Let’s compare *The Room* to any other rom-com movie to see if the original intent of Tommy Wiseau – who, arguably, has more mysteries around him than the film – was to make a good movie.

The story in short (*spoiler alert!*): Johnny (played by the director, Tommy Wiseau), the successful banker, is engaged to Lisa. Lisa becomes dissatisfied with the relationship, so she and Mark (Johnny’s best friend) start dating without Johnny knowing it. Denny (also a friend of Johnny’s), who also has some problems that are hard to deal with, gets involved with Lisa as well. Some character development, some tense scenes, nothing out of the ordinary, right? The movie shows signs of a basic rom-com. The story – from a great distance – looks okay.

The music in the movie: out of 29 songs, 24 of them are originally written by the composer Mladen Milicevic. As almost always, the music here serves as a mood changer. Does it help? Well, I will let you decide on that. However, nothing out of the ordinary just yet. The acting? Not great, but there is something worse.

Indeed, the script. Which, surprise, surprise, is written by Tommy Wiseau. And so, this is where the fun starts. **The lines in the script are so bad (good?) that I have to mention a few. Let these lines speak for themselves.**

“It’s bullshit, I did not hit her. I did nooooot. Oh hi, Mark!” or “Anyway, how’s your sex life?”, or even “Leave your stupid comments in your pocket!”. I mean to hell with *Casablanca*, *Reservoir Dogs* or even with *American Beauty*. I just wonder where the Oscar for best original screenplay for H.E. Tommy Wiseau is.

Thus, the conclusion stays clear: these movies are bad. But on this note, let us revert back to the original, provocative, and highly absurd question: why do we (*still!*) love these movies? Because in the end, they are high-quality fun. And by that I mean, a sarcastic kind of fun, a sense of humour that cannot be enjoyed by everyone, making it even more attractive to those who understand it.

For within bad movies, the humour is not written by the scriptwriter, but is created by the audience. That’s the magic of it.

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Helena Santidrián Mas

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The iconography of Santiago Matamoros in Compostela. A Paradox.

I was born in a small town in Galicia, in the North West of Spain, Santiago de Compostela. It is famous due to El Camino ('The Way'), a pilgrimage that gradually developed over the Middle Ages to the hypothetical tomb of James the Great, one of the Apostles. One of the most common ways of representing this biblical character is while he kills "the unfaithful". The origin of the iconography is supposed to be the Battle of Clavijo (figure 1), which took place in 844 AD. The Apostle is supposed to have appeared miraculously to help the Christian Kingdoms against the Muslims that had started conquering the Iberian Peninsula in 711 AD.

Santiago de Compostela has been said to be the city where everyone is welcome, a place of reconciliation... Though a sculpture of James the Great beheading the non-believers –who happened to be "Moors"¹ – is one of the first things one sees when entering the Cathedral of Compostela. The Catholic diocese of Santiago seems to avoid any controversy around the figure, eliminating statues from the Cathedral, choosing not to speak about the actual historical meaning of the iconography or even changing the way of describing it, making it sound heroic. This is a very contemporary and relevant paradox that can be linked to the Black Lives Matter issues and demonstrations in the United States and to the controversy raised by the damaging of conquerors' statues: should they be left as they are, should the signs of vandalism be eliminated or should the monuments be completely removed? So the debate I propose here is whether the figures of the Apostle should remain in Compostela or be eliminated. In order to understand it better, I will start with the legend that explains why James the Great is buried in Santiago de Compostela.

James the Great, the Apostle. The legend, his burial place and the pilgrimage

The Apostle James the Great has also been called St. Jacob, Jack, Jacques, Iacobus, Jacobus, Giacomo, Jacopo, Yago, Iago, Diego, Thiago or Tiago...and

Santiago! He was martyred in Jerusalem around 44 AD, but some sources say that for some time he went to Spain to preach (“Hic Spaniae et occidentalia loca predicat”, *Breviarium Apostolorum*, end of the 6th Century–beginning of the 7th Century; and after, *De Ortibus et Obitu Patrum*, attributed to Isidore of Seville, beginning of the 7th Century) (Carmona Muela, 2003). The possibility that James the Great may have been to the Iberian Peninsula, despite what these sources say, is very unlikely. It is, though, a useful—but very questionable—theory to justify the later discovery of his tomb in Spain.

Many texts were written about how the body of the apostle, who had travelled to preach and then had been killed in Jerusalem, had been moved again to Spain (for example, *Traslato Sancti Jacobi*, 11th Century, Book III of the *Codex Calixtinus*) (Carmona Muela, 2003, p. 407). Some stories say that the corpse was brought to Galicia by some disciples and buried in the ancient town Iria Flavia, the current city of Padrón, a few miles away from Santiago. The exact burial place was then forgotten. The legend says that around 813 AD a hermit saw in the sky some strange lights or stars (a theory for the etymology of Compostela is *campus stellae*, ‘field of stars’, which refers to the strange lights the hermit saw above the burial place). He assumed they were marking the tomb of the Apostle and alerted the bishop Teodomiro. A marble sarcophagus with a body inside was found. The body was identified by the bishop as the Apostle’s and King Alfonso II of Asturias decided to found a church at that exact point. It gradually became bigger and bigger and pilgrims from all over Europe and all over the world started to visit it. This church is now the Cathedral of Compostela. The pilgrimage was established over the years and we now refer to it as *El Camino*. The German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) said that Europe was born through pilgrimage to Compostela (attr.).

Santiago Matamoros, the iconography. A symbol and a national hero

One of the most famous iconographies of Saint James (Santiago) is the Santiago Matamoros, which means ‘Santiago killing Moors’ or ‘Santiago, the Moor-slayer’. The Apostle appears in many images (including paintings, sculptures, silver plates, medals and other artworks) riding a white rearing horse with a sword in his hand while beheading the unbelievers (the Moors). One of these sculptures, a wooden piece, is placed on top of the main altar of the Cathedral (figure 2), where pilgrims were invited to stay for the night if they didn’t have money. The Cathedral was, and is, supposed to be a place where foreigners and pilgrims are welcome. Another figure of the same iconography is placed on top of the organ (figure 3), and another two, a statue and a bas-relief of the Battle of Clavijo, overlook the Obradoiro Square (the main square of the city) from the City Hall’s facade (figure 4).

Besides, Santiago, the Apostle, and this particular iconography became a patriotic symbol after the aforementioned Battle of Clavijo and during the Reconquista (when, around 718/722 AD, Christian kingdoms came to (re)conquer the Muslim territories of the Iberian Peninsula). He was called *Patrón de España*, which means

patron, protector, guardian of Spain, in the *O Dei Verbum Patris*, fourth quarter of the 8th Century (Carmona Muela, 2003, p. 409) —a hymn for the King of Asturias Mauregato, attributed to Beato of Liébana, a very important source of the cult of Santiago (Pérez de Urbel, 1952, p. 18). The Apostle was later proclaimed Patron of Spain by King Philip IV and Pope Urban VIII (López, 2008, p. 50).

“Santiago!” and “Santiago y cierra, España” became war cries. “Santiago y cierra, España” can be translated as “Saint James, come and close, Spain!”. It is a prayer to the Apostle to intercede in the war against the Muslims and help the Christians win (as he did in Clavijo). The phrase has recently been adopted by Spanish far-right political groups such as Vox, that see in the Apostle a leader, a guide (Vox, 2020), as they think the Peninsula should be “reconquered” again from immigrants.

During the Spanish colonisation of the Americas, Santiago became Mataindios, incentivising images where the Apostle kills “Indians” (figure 5), sometimes used as a way to give strength to the Spanish soldiers (Domínguez García, 2006, p. 48), or even Mataespañoles; native South Americans borrowed this iconography and turned it against the conquistadores, the invaders of their land, the españoles (figure 6).

During Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975) many historical and biblical characters of Spanish and world history were converted into symbols of patriotism, and they remained so in the collective imagination for decades. That is the case of, for example, Pelagius, a nobleman who is supposed to have started the Reconquista against Muslims, and the case of the Apostle Santiago. Matamoros turned into Matarojos as a result of Franco’s regime (Mullen, 2010); the rojos (‘red people’) being the communists that were persecuted and killed during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the dictatorship.

As one can see, every declination of this iconography is anything but coherent with a city that is supposed to welcome pilgrims, as Compostela should be.

An embarrassing paradox

Over the past decades, Santiago de Compostela has been a “victim” of many marketing operations aimed at boosting tourism. It has been said to be “the city where everyone is welcome”. However, it is quite a curious paradox that pilgrims from the whole world arrive at a place that “welcomes” them with several statues of Santiago Matamoros. Some months ago one of the wooden statues in the Cathedral was moved from one of the chapels of the transept, where it had been since the 50s, to a closed chapel that is being restored. The excuse given by the director of the Cathedral Foundation was that the piece did not originally belong to that space and that it had been placed there provisionally. But no other explanations have been declared (Luaña, 2021). However, during a quite politically correct guided tour I followed in December 2021, as part of my research for this piece, I asked what had happened with the statue and the guide

answered that they were restoring it, and was not willing at all to speak about the iconography. Why the statue has been moved is not clear at all. Moreover, the words “Santiago Matamoros” were not pronounced once during the whole visit (110 minutes inside the Cathedral), instead, the guide preferred to use “Santiago Caballero”. It is worth mentioning that caballero in Spanish means both ‘knight’ and ‘gentleman’. The exact same thing happens on the website of the Cathedral: any explanation about the actual meaning of this iconography is avoided. There is a section dedicated to the representation of Santiago, divided into three parts: “Santiago Apóstol”, “Santiago Peregrino” and “Santiago Caballero” (Santiago as the Apostle, as a pilgrim and as a knight). In the text where this last iconography is explained, the word “Moors”, or “Muslims”, or “Matamoros” do not appear once. Though the Apostle is described as a knight, as a warrior that rides a horse in an attack position, that wields a sword, that crowns the main altar, that dominates a chapel. Santiago is not mentioned as “Matamoros” on the whole website.

It is surprising how “Matamoros” has been replaced by “Caballero”, a word that has a rather positive meaning in any of its definitions. On the website all references to the murder of Muslims, to racism and to the symbol the figure has become have been completely eluded. So not only has Santiago Matamoros, meaning ‘the Moor-slayer’², suffered a proper *damnatio memoriae*, he has also been transformed into a gentleman, a knight, a warrior, a guide, a leader. The Church, which should be welcoming and tolerant, especially in a city like Compostela, is reluctant to discuss the symbol and seems to describe Santiago Matamoros in a surprisingly similar way as some far-right parties do. What an unfortunate coincidence. Furthermore, the chapel that used to host the statue has now been used to commemorate Teodomiro (figure 7), the bishop who “discovered” the tomb of the Apostle and to remember the visits of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI (Libertad Digital, 2021). It is nothing but an ode to tradition and a way to escape, once more, controversies around Santiago Matamoros. It is embarrassing that the city sells itself as “welcoming” and “peaceful” but does not have the courage to discuss the statue, its iconography, its history.

After all these legends, stories, names, texts, everything comes to one problem: should the statues of Santiago Matamoros be left there or should they be removed? All this is linked to some conversations I have had over the past months with my beloved friend and colleague Anna Ainio about the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and the demonstrations and vandalism of many monuments dedicated to conquerors. We have debated the dilemma of restoring and removing graffiti from the statues, taking them down or leaving them in their place. Anna then turned this issue into her History of Art dissertation topic. Although the conqueror’s statues she discusses in her work had been vandalised and the figures of Santiago Matamoros have not, and even though her paper involves a different geographical area and a different political situation, the debate remains the same: are all these statues racist symbols? Should they, therefore, be removed? I do not think, as Ainio states in her dissertation (2021), that any statue should be completely removed, including the ones of Santiago Matamoros. Removing them, as the Cathedral of Santiago has done with the one that used to be in one of the transepts, and eluding any

debate around them is nothing but denying the past. Not speaking about these symbols and not explaining them leads to forgetting our history. And it is, as I have said before, not only a *damnatio memoriae* to the iconography itself but most importantly, to the people that have been assassinated over the years as a result of religious wars and conflicts, that we now interpret as racism (this concept cannot be directly applied to a Medieval historical context). It is an offence to the people that still today suffer from racial and religious discrimination and that every year are killed because of it. The statues have to remain where they are, as a testimonial of our history, as proof of the racism that unfortunately still exists today. However, Santiago de Compostela and its Church owe an explanation to the people who visit the city and to its citizens. I believe the solution to the issue is to leave the statues as they are but to accompany them with a deep explanation, to speak about them during the guided tours, to add a special section on the website. Everyone deserves to know what those statues are and what they mean, so it absolutely has to be widely, broadly, deeply explained to every person that passes by, to all visitors, to all pilgrims. This way maybe everyone will, finally, feel welcomed.

Footnotes

1 The Iberian Peninsula was conquered in 711 AD by Muslims, who were called "Moors" (in Spanish, "moros") by the Christian Kingdoms.

2 The Museum of Pilgrimage (Museo das Peregrinacións e de Santiago) does have almost a whole floor dedicated to explain the iconography and figure of Santiago Matamoros. It belongs to the regional government (Xunta de Galicia) and it is not linked to the Church in any way. The Chief Curator has sent me three of the images that can be found in the article. They were catalogued as "Santiago Matamoros", "Santiago Mataindios" and "Santiago Mataespañoles".



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

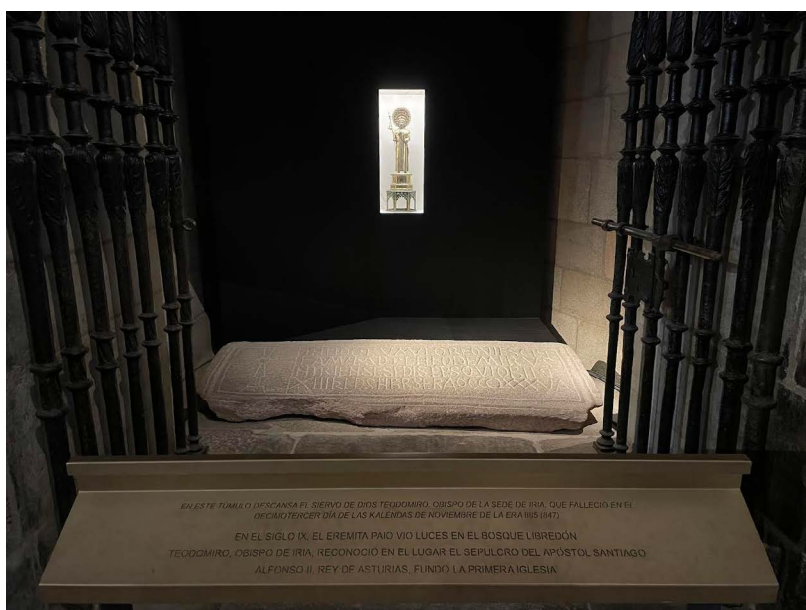


Figure 7

FIGURES

Figure 1 *Santiago Matamoros in the Battle of Clavijo*, attributed to Gabriel de la Corte, second half of the 17th Century, oil on canvas. Image courtesy of Museo das Peregrinacións e de Santiago (Xunta de Galicia)

Figure 2 *Santiago Matamoros*, top of the baldachin, main altar of the Cathedral, Mateo de Prado, 1667 circa © Fundación Catedral de Santiago

Figure 3 *Santiago Matamoros*, top of the organ of the Cathedral, Miguel de Romay, 1705-1708 circa © Fundación Catedral de Santiago

Figure 4 *Santiago Matamoros* on top of the Pazo de Raxoi, City Hall's facade, and Battle of Clavijo inside the tympanum, by José Ferreiro (1738-1830). Photo by Helena Santidrián Mas

Figure 5 *Santiago Mataindios*, Colonial School (Peru), 1775-1800, oil on canvas. Image courtesy of Museo das Peregrinacións e de Santiago (Xunta de Galicia)

Figure 6 *Santiago Mataespañoles*, Colonial School (Cuzco, Peru), 1834-1866, chiseled silver. Image courtesy of Museo das Peregrinacións e de Santiago (Xunta de Galicia)

Figure 7 The chapel that used to host the wooden statue of Santiago Matamoros, now used to commemorate Teodomiro. Photo by Helena Santidrián Mas

The Museum of Pilgrimage (Museo das Peregrinacións e de Santiago) does have almost a whole floor dedicated to explain the iconography and figure of Santiago Matamoros. It belongs to the regional government (Xunta de Galicia) and it is not linked to the Church in any way. The Chief Curator has sent me three of the images that can be found in the article. They were catalogued as "Santiago Matamoros", "Santiago Mataindios" and "Santiago Mataespañoles".

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Lilian Clark

edited by
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Herbal Medicine: How effective is it?

It is not unknown that certain plants possess therapeutic properties. In fact, the oldest traces of herbal medicine – a science, and an art, based on preventing and treating ailments using plants – date back to five thousand years ago, when Sumerians in Mesopotamia wrote herbal recipes on clay tablets (Petrovska, 2012). Archeologists have also discovered an entire intact papyrus on which Ancient Egyptians categorized as many as 850 recipes (Abou El-Soud, 2010). Farther to the East, ayurvedic texts were first written down in India and its surrounding countries in the 4th century BCE (Reddy et al., 2007). Today, Chinese herbalism is one of the most globally acknowledged, since it is still widely present in Chinese contemporary medical practices; a tendency that is far from surprising given the country's history. Indeed, The Pen Ts'ao Ching is the oldest Chinese pharmacopeia found to this day: it compiles texts on three hundred sixty five herbs supposedly written by the emperor Shen-Nung who studied the effect of plants on human health around five thousand years ago. However, even though herbal medicine has been around for so long and countless cultures have relied on this traditional practice for centuries, modern medicine has somehow taken over. Why? Does modern medicine provide more effective treatments? To what extent exactly does herbal medicine work? In this article, I will inquire into these questions.

In today's Western culture, most people tend to head to the pharmacy or to their physician hoping they can be provided with a simple and effective synthetic drug that will fix whichever condition they may have. Why are man-made drugs our go-to, even though the vast majority of them contain the very same therapeutic agents found in plants? There is indeed a growing interest in alternative treatments. Actually, the trade of medicinal plants and herbs has an annual growth rate of 15% recorded by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019). According to one study, 6-48% (numbers vary greatly depending on the country) of the EU population has used herbal medicine at least once (Eardley et al., 2012). A very common example is the use of chamomile tea for relaxation and better sleep; another example is garlic, which has antimicrobial and cardioprotective properties. I myself have used rosehip oil to successfully heal and fade a large hyperpigmented surgical scar, a much cheaper alternative to silicone gel. In fact, the attractive costs of herbal treatments are one of the reasons why they are preferred. This, among culture and history, explains why 80% of the population

in developing countries depend on them almost entirely (WHO, 2019). On top of this, what captures the interest of individuals seeking alternative treatments is the holistic aspect of this type of therapy. Doctors are criticized for not taking a step back and looking at their patient as a whole, instead quickly prescribing them some drugs that simply have the opposite effect of the symptoms presented, hoping they will go away. Herbalists on the other hand tend to take their time, ask the patient about their diet, their mood, their lifestyle, look at their tongue or smell their breath - which is hardly to be seen among today's physicians. As our body parts are all linked in more than one way, occasionally the main symptom is a sign of a different problem, somewhere else, and possibly more serious. A herbalist will then aim to treat the overall illness instead of that one symptom only. This way, every individual gets a tailored treatment corresponding to the uniqueness of their body and its condition.

Of course, another major attractive characteristic of herbal medicine is that it is natural. However, this does sometimes lead to the belief, and complete misconception, that "natural" implies "good" and "safe". Seeking something more natural mostly comes from a fear of side effects of synthetic drugs. But, there is also a danger that comes with using plants. For instance, using certain plants alongside other drugs, synthetic or not, can be harmful. Adverse reactions usually include elevated liver enzymes or kidney damage. Garlic, which I previously mentioned, can for example make you bleed more easily if taken in large amounts. So it is best to avoid it if you are taking warfarin which is a blood thinner (Garilli et al., 2021). Also, echinacea (in the daisy family), commonly used to treat colds and flus, can lower the immune system if used over a long period of time. Much worse is the allergic reaction to the plant. If someone is allergic to its pollen, they could very well be severely allergic to the root or the leaf too. An allergic reaction to echinacea can be particularly bad, the worst being anaphylaxis. This is why it is crucial to always let your doctor know about any herbal medicines you may be taking. Not only can natural medicines be bad for you in some cases, but they can also be insufficient. For several serious diseases, plants are simply not potent enough.

When it comes to depression or cancer, herbal treatments will not be successful. They definitely can be complementary to another treatment, but will not cure these severe illnesses on their own. This is at least what we are told and what researchers have observed. Alternative medicines are considered to be less of a good option in comparison to modern medicine, due to the lack of high-quality studies on them. Clinical trials are regularly conducted and most of the time results show that the natural drug is just as ineffective as a sugar pill. Some people believe the lack-of-scientific-proof excuse is just a cover that doctors use and the actual reason for their rejection of herbal medicine is that they fear how powerful it may be. After all, those doctors have put a lot of time, money and effort to get to where they are, which could explain why they feel the need to solely support and practice the modern medicine they have been trained to do. Certain doctors will admit that, yes, plants may help patients cope with side effects such as the nausea, the pain and the fatigue that cancer patients experience. But they are only truly effective against minor ailments such as rashes or digestive issues.

In summary, the skepticism towards modern medicine is growing, which boosts the attraction to herbalism. Indeed, herbal treatments can be rather appealing as they may have fewer side effects (if used properly), are often cheaper, and take a more holistic approach. Although we do not have enough scientific evidence showing its effectiveness, 60% of the world population still relies heavily on herbal remedies (WHO, 2019). Of course, in Western societies, one tends to make use of it for treating minor ailments only, while trusting conventional medicine to handle more severe conditions. Nevertheless, as more patients observe how helpful it can be as a complementary medicine, I must say, the future of herbal medicine definitely looks promising.

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Emma Gabor

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The Search for Genius 'The works and genius of André Aciman'

The world became familiar with André Aciman when *Call me by Your Name* made the news for its thorough, sensual and profound impact. Since then, hearing Aciman's name elicits great joys amongst many, myself included. As a contemporary writer of fiction and non-fiction, Aciman is an academic who adores Marcel Proust, constantly exploring his identity, almost like a strict, opinionated psychologist. Diving into his Jewish and multi-cultural origins through various works, namely *Out of Egypt* or *Harvard Square*, Aciman combines fiction with memory and truth. His characters fit into the topos of the misunderstood intellectual who is lost in the maze of feelings and thoughts, inherently attached, yet detached from the world. Indeed, it is my belief that he is exploring his own self through his diverse, yet similarly constructed characters, circling around the underlying subject of the genius type. Whether he himself is conscious of his genius remains a mystery, though based on his constant self-doubt and self-inflicted criticism, I feel inclined to believe he is not. Therefore, while genius is a matter of subjectivity, I aim to show the reader to the best of my abilities, in what ways Aciman may most definitely be an imaginative, innovative and ingenious human being.

To be perfectly transparent, my relationship with contemporary literature is complex and usually leans towards a sentiment of dislike. Indeed, classical works seem to be so much more complex, deep and (r)evolutionary for me. However, to me, Aciman is an exception from this sentiment, if not the exception. His explorations and understandings of human nature give us a palpable, yet inherently abstract view of what the inner world of a human may look like. He aims to explore earthly life through the timeless search for God, or a higher entity that may explain our existence. Though we understand through his writing, that he either never actually wishes to reach this ideal, or that he doesn't in fact consider it a reachable goal, rather, one that is possibly understandable to humans only in the afterlife. Indeed, one is inevitably provoked into the act of thinking through the beauty in his words' truths: "Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot" (Aciman, 2007, p. 156), and "So I waited. Then I got used to waiting. Eventually, waiting was more real than what we had." (Aciman, 2017)

His references and resources – the greatest and the nicest of philosophers, artists and thinkers – have a way of inserting themselves within his paragraphs as visitors of a most illustrious kind; within two pages in *Harvard Square*, he mentions “Fellini, Renoir, and Visconti” in the context of courtship, while wooing a woman himself, to be followed by *La Princesse de Clèves*, Chaucer and Saint Augustine (Aciman, 2013, p. 138-139), two highbrows in love talking of their future plans, as you would. But it is his style that is most alluring: he writes with both certainty and uncertainty, belief and disbelief, faith and the greatest doubts, and the inherent presence of what I like to call “factual mystery.” What I mean by factual mystery is the way Aciman gives a historical fact, something that happened to his family or a fictional character, or a community, the reader urged to believe him with such undeniable certainty! Not because it is necessarily true, but because there’s always the intrinsic presence of a ‘there’s more’, or a ‘there is something he is not telling us and therefore he must know something important we don’t, but that we couldn’t possibly understand’. Take this as an example, Aciman talking about his deaf mother in *Out of Egypt*: “She could sniff out guile with the cunning of a fox, but she could not about the snares of sophistry. Arguments turned against her, because she knew how to shout, not how to argue, because, in the kingdom of words, she would always remain a stranger.” (Aciman, 1994, p. 141) Through these words, Aciman hints at frustration, conflict, and even the potential unhappiness of his mother, one that we don’t actually explicitly read about in the book, but one that is always implied. In fact, doesn’t mystery provoke the greatest desires in mankind? Isn’t mystery the impression that fuels our greatest curiosity? Isn’t it precisely the mystery of our existence that makes us want the answers to it?

Indeed, I believe Aciman’s genius lies in his ability to provoke both curiosity and understanding within us. At the same time as we question his own inquiries, we also already know and understand the answers to them: “form is the imposition of design. In the absence of God, in the absence of identity, in the absence of love, even, is design— perhaps even the illusion of design.” (Aciman, 2021, p. 112) Therefore, Aciman is not just a writer, but a philosopher too. Yet again, we are faced with another dilemma: for indeed, he doesn’t assure (us) a lot. He doesn’t say much, he refuses to answer his own questions. Sometimes, it is because he cannot and often because it appears he is afraid of the answers himself. Or maybe he merely wants each of us to ponder and answer them ourselves. Perhaps it is all of these things.

However, I wish to argue that more often than not, his questions are the answers themselves. In my opinion, the philosopher in Aciman understands that posing the right questions is more important than having the answers. With questions, one may inquire further. With answers, one indubitably comes to a halt, even if it isn’t completely final: “Is it better to speak or to die?” (Aciman, 2007) asks Elio’s mother famously in *Call me by Your Name*. Indeed, getting what we want is more final than always reaching towards the future, which is precisely what Aciman does. He never settles in the now. He goes back to the past, trying to understand his present, but always and inevitably ends up in the future, even if it is near.

Why? I strongly believe it is because uncertainty is surer than certainty. It gives

you hope, faith, it never lets you down, for it is not real. Strongly connected to fantasies, the future is more assured than the present. The present is certainty. It is sure and unchangeable, constant. It gives you nothing but the sheer, harsh honesty of your reality, whereby you have to face everything, however uncouth it may be, but especially yourself. And this latter is perhaps the scariest experience for anyone, anywhere. In my view, Aciman finds this duller than he cares to admit. What makes it more alluring to him is his own mind, his own world, wherein he can get lost. His books and writings are an ideal result of his search for that ‘something more’, something special in the present, through reaching in the future and thereby half-avoiding his reality. For indeed, while living in it, he is constantly attempting to better it through harmless ignorance and illusions. So the question inevitably arises: is it only Aciman who is doing this, or is this willful ignorance one that we all share as humans?

If Aciman is a genius because he is consciously and conveniently avoiding his present, then aren't we all? People so often and so carelessly live their days without really being there. Mankind has found great advances in trying to mitigate this phenomena (a strong contender being spirituality or in fact religion). But in this way, it is too easy for us to ignore Aciman's reality only to claim him different, when truly and inherently, we are all going through the same human experience. Thus, to contradict myself briefly, we may infer that Aciman is not a genius: he simply has a special talent at expressing humanity's great questions, experiences and sufferings in a way that touches us all. Not because the words are special, but because the experiences and sentiments are universal. Aciman manages to unite us all through his writing, effortlessly drawing us in, creating and coloring a world that appears to be more than it is and is more than it appears. Undeniably, even if we didn't wonder about the big questions of humanity's origins, after reading Aciman, we cannot ignore their pertinence, nor their urgency. Take this quote, as a meaningful observation about the great mystery of time: “Because no matter how crafty the ancient grammarians, we still don't know how to think of time.” (Aciman, 2021) However, for my own peace of mind and faith in humanity—one that falters every once in a while—I wish to return to my initial argument, that of Aciman's genius. For indeed, believing that there are special people in the world, people that have a mission other than fulfilling their own desires to instead help advance humanity, gives *me* hope that there *is* hope in humanity after all.

Hence, in the end, does Aciman's genius lie in his own uncertainty and vision of the world? Is he as lost as we all are? And if he is, then does his greatest tragedy of not finding his place in the world (and thereby not finding peace), give the world his greatest gift? Is the tragedy of the genius type his own unhappiness in favor of that of others? And if yes, is that at all fair? Who chose him and why is he the one who was chosen? What karma is he repaying?

Inevitably, we may infer that in the end, this is all but a vicious circle. For it is through his writing that he wills to become less lonely, more alike with people, by positing himself in different worlds of uncertainty and into his unreal mood. However, he thereby also strengthens his genius, which is also his source of loneliness. Aciman is therefore here and yet not; he is also there, though not

entirely. He is between worlds and between people and between two ends of a spectrum he is invariably represented by. He is on one end, desiring to be on the other. Therefore, instead of becoming less lonely and finding himself and his source, he virtually strengthens his loneliness and provides himself with a tool that both weakens and strengthens his in-between state: writing about his origins, he inevitably ends up writing about life and about death. He is his own worst enemy without being conscious of it, or at least, without appearing as though trying to change it, which may be part of the genius blessing/curse. Therefore, to honor Aciman with a *mise en abyme*, the following questions become pertinent: was genius given to him or did he take it himself? Did he take it because he wanted to be less lonely and misunderstood or was he born a genius, thereby also born lonely and essentially, inevitably, intrinsically misunderstood? Is genius nothing more, but the sacrifice of one's own happiness and the opportunity for a happy life in order to gift humanity something?

So where does genius come from? Is it assigned before birth, at birth or after birth? And if before birth, then who decides? Who is so cruel and yet so kind, as to curse an individual's life, only to bless the lives of others? This spectrum of two radical ends, one being the state of genius and the other that of a full life, coincides with the idea that stupid and ignorant people live a more happy life, whereas smart people often don't. So is ignorance truly bliss? And if it is, then what must a genius feel like? If average people feel lonely and misunderstood, then what do the geniuses feel? Do they realize their misfortune or are they so bound by their own mind and endeavors, that they fail to truly be conscious of the curse that has befallen onto them?

In the end, Aciman's constant state of being, based on his tales, is the unreal mood. And if it indeed is, then Aciman exists in a world that is neither reality, nor its opposite. He is between the material and the spiritual, between the present, the past and the future, but in neither entirely. Attempting to understand Aciman's genius is a prolonged process of pertinent inquiries into the deepest corners of the mind and the heart. Aciman's origins are humanity's origins. Through desiring to understand himself, he is actually making us wonder about our own origins; by making us feel all connected, he not only reunites a community, but most faithfully, he reunites humanity by probing into its depths, fears and passions. In the end, we all seem to wonder about "the might-have-been that never happened but isn't unreal for not happening and might still happen, though we fear it never will and sometimes wish it won't happen or not quite yet." (Aciman, 2021, p. 238)

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Alex Rednaxela

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Trusting Bitcoin in a Trustless World?

Bitcoin uses more energy than all of Argentina!

Bitcoin requires 80% as much power as the whole of New York!

Bitcoin requires seven times more energy than the global operations of Alphabet!

All these comparisons are valid and none of their claims are incorrect.

In this article, I'll attempt to explain why the energy cost of bitcoin is so absurd, look at how people are taming that absurdity, and discuss what all those absurd gigawatts could possibly be yielding for humanity.

Let's start from the ground floor. When you buy bitcoin, what do you actually *get*? Simply, you get a fraction of the bitcoin network and the right to authorise what happens to it next. You might have heard people rationalise this 'value' as analogous to a dollar or euro, but the comparison is completely inaccurate.

Fiat currencies (dollars, euros, pounds, etc.) are guaranteed only by the potential violence of their issuers. That violence can manifest as fines, arrest, imprisonment, or far worse throughout history and in many places today, but fundamentally a euro is valued as a euro and a dollar as a dollar because respective governments make the maintenance of this value an inextricable part of their exercise of power. The institutionalised coercion of a police force, justice system and army result in my ability to pop down the supermarket and swap a handful of signifiers for some sandwiches and a coffee. A fiat currency doesn't take value from anything 'real': its value rests on the tangible power and institutional complexity of the nation itself.

Not that fiat currencies don't work – indeed they're efficient and convenient – but the fact that arbitration of this value system is monopolised certainly has its disadvantages.

First of all, circulation: in the first three months of the pandemic, the US Federal Reserve (Fed) magicked up three *trillion* dollars to pump into the commercial banking system. This electronic money swells the reserves of banks like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley who typically use it to make large asset purchases on the free market. The Fed then receive large amounts of bonds (Treasury

and agency securities) in return, all of which are backed by bundles of home mortgages. Since the banks are now flush with trillions of digital dollars, they immediately lower barriers to entry for *more* mortgages, fulfilling the circular prophecy while encouraging more borrowing of the sort that created biblical rack and ruin in 2008. It only gets even more absurd. Every year, the Fed buy trillions in Treasury securities, but it doesn't buy them from the Treasury itself. Instead, the Fed take generated cash and buy these securities back from the commercial banks who originally bought them from the Treasury. The Treasury then pays the interest it owes on those securities to the Fed, who pay the profit from these securities right back to the Treasury. In case that little loop confused you (it's confusing me), the US government is simply paying its debts back to itself. Can you imagine if you or I could make credit card payments into our own bank accounts?

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This is before you learn how Congress regulates the market in its own interests. The STOCK act of 2012 finally required lawmakers to publicly disclose their trades, but [violations](#) usually only result in a \$200 fine and the bill fails to even mention insider trading - an act rife among members of congress that is classed as severe felony if carried out by a member of the public.

On January 24, 2020, the Senate Committees on Health and Foreign Relations held a closed meeting to debrief senators on the novel coronavirus and its projected impact on the US. Immediately after the meeting, Senator Kelly Loeffler sold stock worth up to 3.1 million dollars, Senator David Perdue began buying stocks in DuPont, who make PPE, and the goddamned Chairman of the US Intelligence Committee Richard Burr decided to [offload](#) up to 1.7 million dollars in stock even as he told the public: "Luckily, we have a framework in place that has put us in a better position than any other country to respond to a public health threat like the coronavirus". And lest you think it only Republicans who engage in this type of behaviour, Nancy Pelosi has been dubbed '[the Queen of Stonks](#)'. An industry has grown up around copying her trades, with retail investors scrabbling to find where she's putting her money. In July of this year, her husband made [\\$5.3 million](#) trading Alphabet stock right before the House Judiciary Committee voted on antitrust regulation. Naturally, Nancy had 'no knowledge' of her husband's trades.

The Department of Justice launched a probe into this insider trading scandal last year. As of now, all investigations are closed and no charges were brought against any individual. In this world of national currencies, there is no democratic ruleset.

The way money (value) works for you and I is entirely different to the way it works for those in positions of political or economic power. It's a pyramid of descending priority, where those at the very top interact with finance as they please and everyone beneath is forced to accept the existence of myriad rulesets: not just one for us and one for them, but one for Kelly Loeffler, another for Richard Burr, another for Nancy Pelosi, and an entirely different one for *you*.

Seems a bit unfair, doesn't it?

So where does bitcoin come in? Unlike national currencies, bitcoin is not guaranteed by violence. Instead, bitcoin is validated by its ledger, agreed upon across a wide network of "nodes". In bitcoin's case, "nodes" are computers, tasked with solving a cryptographic puzzle in order to create the next "block" of transactions. Each "block" records *how much* bitcoin moved and from *where to where* within the time it took to create itself (the network targets 10 minutes, but it varies slightly). This is the "chain of blocks" that "blockchain" refers to. Whichever node on the network successfully solves the block puzzle first is rewarded. These rewards began at 50 bitcoin / block, but have reduced to 6.25 today as a result of "halving," a process by which rewards are cut fifty percent every 210,000 blocks (roughly 4 years). The more nodes you have competing to create the latest block, the more the network is decentralised and the securer it becomes.

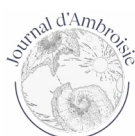
As such, all users interact with bitcoin in exactly the same way. The ruleset is unchanging - and unchangeable. Its parameters were exactly the same on its launch 13 years ago as they are today.

In the blockchain space, a network that features this democratic parity is described as "trustless". Typically, we think of trust as a positive human trait and something we should seek to foster in ourselves. The problem is, we trust elected representatives to behave, just like we trust bankers with all our money.

There is a reason bitcoin was first conceived in 2008.

In a *trustless* world, we wouldn't have to *trust* that Morgan Stanley stopped selling repackaged subprime loans (they didn't), we wouldn't have to trust that the Chairman of the US Intelligence Committee is not dumping stock into the people he is supposed to protect (he is). Rather, we would *know* it, because every single thing they ever did would be there, accessible by all and validated by every decentralised node on the network. Block after block after block of accountability and transparency all the way back to 2008. This level of reliability and repeatability is unknown anywhere in traditional finance, or anywhere else in human society. There has never been an entity so fundamentally fair as bitcoin. It is nothing short of a revolution in property rights: no longer is your house your house because some lord and some knights choose (note the present tense) to protect this right with their swords. Bitcoin validates and protects value - and by extension your property rights - without violence.

So why does it need so *much* energy?



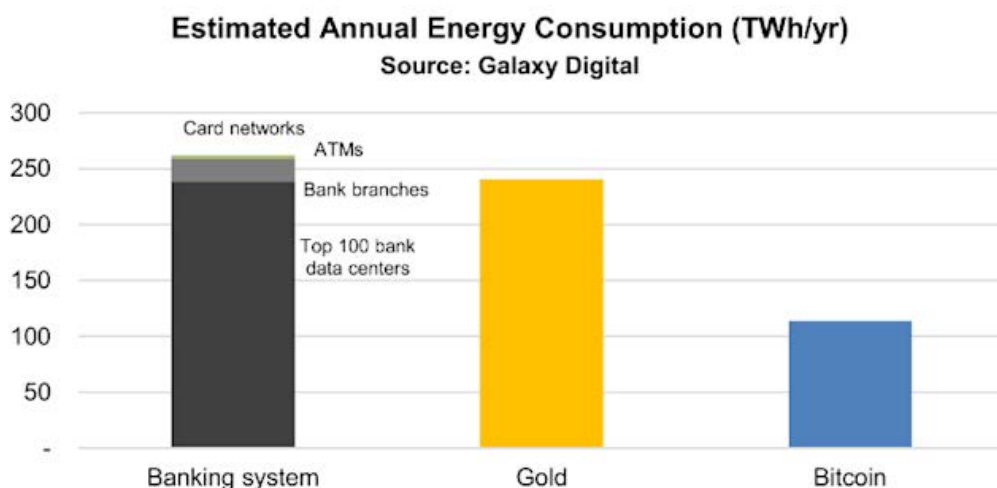
Because any blockchain operating on the proof of work validation principle (bitcoin among them) is vulnerable to a “51% attack”. If any bad actor controlled over 50% of the network’s total computing power, they could recreate the ledger as they pleased, stealing or double-spending bitcoin.

This is why the network must suck up the absurd amount of power that it does: energy is bitcoin’s immune system. In late 2021, a malicious attack on the bitcoin network would not only require the purchase and deployment of countless millions of computers, but access to the almost unattainable amounts of energy required to power them. As the network expands, so does its security and with it the foundations of a fairer, transparent digital economy that would benefit us all.

I am not trying to tell you that bitcoin is not a polluter. Quantifiably, it is.

There are, however, some promising signs.

Using and consuming energy is not inherently harmful to the earth. Charging my phone from a solar panel is no more damaging to the environment than sunbathing; ditto bitcoin mined from renewable sources. Since bitcoin is no more than an economic proposition to its miners, energy cost must be lower than the profits derived from expending that energy. As a result, a global shift has emerged



for miners to either relocate towards existing renewable energy sources or simply build their own solar and wind farms - because these clean forms of energy are cheaper. Research [published](#) this year suggests that bitcoin mining was roughly 56% renewable by Q2 2021, making it one of the most renewable industries in the world - especially in comparison to related businesses like gold. At the same time, bitcoin is rewriting the economics of renewable energy. A freak winter storm in Texas earlier this year knocked out dozens of power plants, sending the grid into meltdown. This tragedy killed 210 people and wrought billions of dollars in property damage. The wind and solar farms proposed to avoid such a breakdown in future are set to continuously generate enough power to serve an impermanent crisis, and as such would have been an economic impossibility just a few years ago. Now, bitcoin miners have agreed to act as an informal “battery,” buying up the vast amounts of excess energy these renewable plants

will generate and shutting down in times of crisis to allow all that excess to flood back into homes and businesses that require it.

[Crusoe Energy Systems](#) are mounting bitcoin mining rigs in shipping containers, powering them with the excess natural gas that oil companies burn off in a process known as 'flaring'. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimate that the 150 billion cubic metres of natural gas burnt off in this process annually creates roughly the same carbon emissions as the whole of Italy. As Crusoe co-founder Chase Lockmiller observes, "the best way to improve the carbon economics of an oilfield is to add a few bitcoin rigs."

Our societies still run on feudal economics. Governments wield currencies and their monopoly on the arbitration of value like latter day Midases, abusing the system for their own benefit and operating above accountability. Giants like Facebook and Apple apply medieval principles to the expansion and maintenance of their top-down empires. The promise of a world on even financial footing is not some fantasy, but a reality quietly taking shape under our noses. Bitcoin might be dirty and an enormous consumer of electricity, but it offers true freedom. A horizontal layer of value accessible to all on identical terms. Property rights guaranteed without violence. No discrimination. No borders. Bitcoin could usher in a world where we don't need passports to travel or visas to work. We have a climate crisis, but we are also facing an unprecedented wealth gap across the developed and developing world. I don't believe it makes sense to shut the door on a solution to one issue just because it is worsening another. Rather, as bitcoin continues to overturn outdated economic ideas, we must make it sustainable and ensure that its revolution is not a bloody one.



Anja Radonjic

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Where am “I” in identity?

I am always filled with inexplicable dread when November comes. Part of it comes from the incessant rain and naked branches indicating the long dark winter is coming. But mostly, I find myself melancholic about a year on the verge of its end, and like a black-and-white film, my memories of the past twelve months play out over and over again. I long for those blissful, mundane times silently. This year, the usual melancholy came with the introduction of a new lockdown here in Austria, a place still so unfamiliar to me. As I listened to the press conferences, frustrated by the rustiness of my German, I wished to pack my bags and return home for lockdown. Strangely, I did not think of the cerulean sea I grew up next to, nor the cafes in old town Kotor, but I thought of the stuffy, box-like room in my old flat on Canteloves Road. This is the first time in five years I cannot simply fly back to London. I still keep the expired residence permit with my passport, if anything, as a reminder of how I have changed, and who I have become. There is great pain—and perhaps a childish sense of injustice—that the self-made home, the lasting friendships and the very life I built amounts to almost nothing once this expiry date has passed. In my stories I always get tangled up between “us” and “them”, lost for which culture I belong to, which society will have me. I am no longer Montenegrin enough, but nor will I ever be considered British. I wonder, which “tribe” will have me?

The first time I noticed a change within me was upon first return to Montenegro, back in the winter of 2016. Not only was I losing the ability to catch on to the jokes and nuances of the brutal humour I once adored, I also became an “other”, jokingly referred to as ‘the English one’. With every return, that impalpable gap between my family and friends and me slowly widened—where I was becoming a guest, a visitor they knew to expect every once in a while. In honesty, their distance was not unfounded. I could only empathise, but I could no longer relate to the excitement of the latest gossip, nor could I intrinsically understand the joys or pains of daily life in Kotor. Like a pendulum, I’ve oscillated for the last five years between a sense of displacement and perpetual longing, never fully content at being either in London or in Kotor. My mindset was neither Montenegrin nor British, but rather a peculiar amalgam of the two. Entirely different in their routines and rules—or lack thereof— I felt the impulsivity and impassioned

behaviour of one culture, and the reservedness and politeness of the other. There was an incredible sense of freedom in knowing, or at least thinking that I understood both. But as time goes on, I am becoming increasingly uncertain about my own identity, about what intrinsically makes me who I am. But, whilst at UCL, meeting people of all walks of life and complex family histories, I came to realise that for some the struggle over identity is a perpetual challenge, one that people struggle with their entire lives.

Living in London was an eye-opening experience : to be exposed to such diversity amongst people, to be inspired by its modern/industrial architecture, and to embrace ambition and different career possibilities, when these were quite scarce as I was growing up. Being in the city exposed me to a world in which working did not mean comfortable living, as I watched the exhausted people on bus 73 going back and forth between jobs, hustling to afford extortionate rent or pay countless bills. But I also felt incredibly comfortable in this city, I was free. I was no longer in a small town, where I knew each individual, or they knew me. Finally, I existed outside of the gaze of my family, my friends, colleagues, or random locals that liked to gossip and embellish the truth. In this sensation of freedom, I was not alone. When I look back at the conversations I had with strangers whilst queuing for coffee on campus, or at the simple student dinners we hosted, what I recall being first struck by was the overwhelming diversity of experiences, cultures and customs of those whom I met. And yet, we were united in our shared experience of young adulthood. Many had grandparents who fought wars with one another, or parents who came from completely different upbringings, and yet by a strange turn of events fell in love and had a family. Now before me stood a testament of a changing world, that for better or for worse, seems less homogenous and less conditioned by national sentiments than before. Through casual conversation, these people slipped seamlessly between two to three languages, revealing the complex nature of their own identity. Some associated their childhood with beaches in Dominica, or to a secluded village in Greek islands, but as adults, they grew into the people they longed to be, existing firmly between the corners of Gordon Square and Gower Street. There is no measurement or predictability on how a place might affect us. The realisation comes only later, once the suitcases and boxes of your life are packed, waiting on the next chapter.

On the whole, our daily lives do not permit us to think too intensely about self-identities. We are taught to fear nostalgia and avoid the uncertainty that such concepts evoke. At university, I came across many people who refused—whether intentionally or subconsciously—to internalise British culture, or to even integrate with communities other than their own. These people only inhabited restaurants and cafes that served the cuisine of their homelands, their friends were from the same countries or even cities; there were no cultural or language barriers to cross. In London, finding shadows of my native culture was a rare and infrequent occurrence. Despite this, there was incredible sweetness that emerged from being able to share a few words of my own language with someone else, a language that morphed into the countless other noises in the streets of London. Once in a Mediterranean shop, I squealed with joy when I found overpriced plazma and domacica, biscuits that I associated with home. The unexpected happiness reminded me I will always have an intimate connection



to my roots—whether they show through the smells and flavours of childhood home, or the language I first learned— the visceral connections which can never be unlearned . Of course, there are those who long to know more about their ancestors, carefully saving up for a trip across the world to meet their cousins for the first time, or to feel the weight of their grandparent’s embrace, after years of this connection being filtered through devices and screens. How we all grasp for roots and for a sense of home, each in our own ways, hiding the homesickness from one another. Defining who you are, who you have become is an impalpable and ongoing process. Something excruciatingly out of reach which stretches beyond the realm of your control. Many do not even have time to think about it. And still, it fascinates me— whenever I am close to finally putting my finger on what my identity truly is, I see that it has already changed. A metamorphosis anew.

The pathway of an individual and their experiences along the way are never orderly and linear, as biographies, or autobiographies would wish us to believe. The roadmap is rarely straightforward and consists of many physical and internal changes. Migration in particular, as I came to realise through my History degree, is a ubiquitous part of humanity and our existence. Like the forces that battle within me, we as humans find ourselves constantly obliged to move and explore further, whilst simultaneously seeking to settle, to find your very own place to lay down roots. Some have spent their lives strengthening borders they have created, others want to tear them down. Today, migration is as much about exploration as it about escaping the dangers and inhabitability of a place once considered home.

I have been wondering lately what our role is in this space, as those that had the opportunities to interact, to be perplexed by, or to love people from all over the world. I sometimes felt like an unofficial ambassador for Montenegro, knowing that my words about this unfamiliar place could affect the narrative of my homeland, the images and the perceptions people could have about the region. There is incredible power in tailoring the story of places you inhabit. This is how myths and stereotypes were crafted. It is how we still perpetuate them today, the expectations we place on one another. But I still think—and I say this cautiously— we are more interconnected than we were before. Although not all, many young people have to reinvent themselves or to gain a better understanding of themselves as they navigate their futures, often in new places away from home and constraints of social upbringing. What role do we have in a deeply polarised world, where reinstating division and clear boundaries is more valuable than a human life? Do those of us with such privilege and opportunity to freely travel and experience places far from home, have any responsibility at all? My mind circles around these ideas on a snowy November day, slightly tormented by personal unanswered questions and lack of a clear direction of what the future holds and where I belong. And still, I feel free, I am still interconnected with people from all over the world, again reminded – I am not alone.



Barbara Ning Balint

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Giovannetti-Singh*

Can you change the opinion of the masses in one night?

In democratic governments, public opinion is a driving force in the creation of policy. Far from a hollow voice, the views, ideas and concerns of a nation are reflected in the political climate – be it directly, through overt demands made to politicians, or more subtly, for example through elections. But is the process really this straightforward? What are the driving forces behind the public opinion? Unfortunately, the whole procedure is more complicated than a linear causation, and there are many factors that should be taken into consideration when analyzing public policy making.

During elections, the act of casting a ballot allows you to choose from a myriad of policy visions, and thus, multiple future scenarios. After the election period, winning parties may turn their words into actions according to their political programmes. The second way of political representation occurs directly with politicians responding to the public's demands, for example through referendums. Unlike indirect elections, during referendums people don't have to make vague choices about their country's future, but are offered specific, and binary, scenarios from which to choose. A factor, however, which has been overlooked far too often, is who exactly we mean when we say 'the public'. Is this hazy definition an aggregation of all the people with equal representation? Or is it a narrower collection of the population? Who are the voices being heard and who are those who have been silenced or overlooked?

According to the political scientist Tom W. Smith (1990), the first opinion poll dates back to 1824. Conducted in North Carolina and Delaware, it aimed to predict the election result and to develop a better nomination process. The opinion poll was published in the local newspaper, *The Harrisburg Pennsylvanian*, and asked the following question: 'who do you plan to vote for in the upcoming elections?'. The results showed that 70% of the respondents planned to cast their vote for Andrew Jackson. While the estimation did provide a more or less correct picture—Jackson did indeed win the election—the margin was much slimmer than the opinion polls indicated. He won against John Quincy Adams with only a narrow popular vote victory (Andrew Jackson- 99, John Quincy Adams- 84, William Harris Crawford- 41), yet the House of Representatives had selected Adams as elected president.

It should be noted that in the early 19th Century, the electoral body was extremely restricted, with only white men who owned property holding the right to vote. As a result, a disparity between the opinion held by the wider public, and that of the electorate, were not too surprising. Despite its long history, the practice of assessing public opinion has by no means been inclusive or an accurate indication of the views of an entire population. Over the past two centuries, the world has changed significantly and Western democracies have finally achieved universal suffrage prohibiting gender, racial and socio-economic discrimination. Despite this, issues surrounding representation within the electoral body still remain—does public opinion really reflect the perspective of all of us? Or is the situation uneasily similar to 1824?

These questions may be tackled by exploring the reasons of voter abstinence. How can someone be heard if they do not speak? How can a citizen be represented if they don't exercise their right to vote? According to John D. Griffin, Professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado, and Newman, Professor of Social Sciences at Pepperdine University (2005), politicians tend to pay more attention to the opinions of voters, rather than to those who have refused to vote. This phenomenon is due to several factors. Firstly, and importantly, the clear aggregate dataset allows the opinions of voters to be easily analysed in a transparent and comprehensible manner. Secondly, non-voters can be hard to identify, and the validity of their thoughts, for example if they are underage, or not citizens of the country, may be placed under scrutiny. Finally, within our current political system, it is voters, not those who abstain, who determine which politicians secure their seats, and thus, strategically are a good demographic to target. Though politicians pay more attention to voters than non-voters, it does not mean that the opinion of the silent group should be ignored.

Moreover, in the study of public opinion, political scientists Stuart N. Soroka & Christopher Wleizen (2010) have revealed a significant thought: public responsiveness, like policy representation, varies across policy domains and political institutions. Whilst there is, undoubtedly, a distinction between voters and non-voters, these categories are much less static than initially thought. Certain issues such as abortion, euthanasia or the legalisation of drugs, attract many people to the ballots, the emotional gravitas of these debates compelling people to vote. These issues affect people in far-reaching ways, and the consequence of the turnout may be perceptible within years, months or even days. On the other hand, some more pedestrian concerns, such as the introduction of speed bumps or changing rates of canton tax rarely drive people to cast their vote. For the majority of people, such administrative matters on quotas or rates may seem boring, and irrelevant in their lives or they don't see the effects in their prospective future. Whilst the boundaries between those who vote and those who abstain are in constant flux, there is one factor which remains unchanged. At the end of the day, the voice that counts is that of the voters—their declared preferences driving the actions of policymakers. In this sense, only the opinion of those who vote reflect the nebulous haze defined as 'public opinion'.

Yet, the goal of this article is neither to propose new methods to increase representation, nor is it to assess the motivation of the non-voters' lack of

awareness. Instead, I seek to provide an understanding of the connection between the public opinion (the opinion of the voters) and public policy outcomes. This connection starts when considering the 1995 Quebec sovereignty referendum. The 1995 referendum, was held 15 years after the first referendum on whether to give the Government of Quebec the mandate to negotiate a sovereignty-association agreement between Quebec and Canada. The second referendum held in 1995, was also centred around the question of sovereignty, but this time it posed the question on whether Quebec should proclaim national sovereignty and seek for independence? I chose the Quebec referendum example, as it is not only an issue that may have changed history, but the result of the referendum had influence on every citizen's life in Quebec, even on their identity as well.

Lawrence LeDuc, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Toronto, points out that beside ideologies and partisan preferences, voting choice may depend on other short-term political factors that exceed the issue presented on the referendum ballot. Public opinion may be easily shaped within a short period of time, especially amongst hesitating voters and the lay population. These wavering voters may only possess a superficial understanding of an issue, rather than a profound or personal connection to it. Therefore, the political campaign that precedes the referendum may be directed mainly towards the 'undecided' voters' (LeDuc, 2002). Politicians are concerned to secure the majority of votes, thus they need to attract votes of people other than partisan voters. Parti québécois Government knew that the support of sovereigntist voters was stable, but their success also depended on the votes of 'soft nationalists'.

In the early periods of the campaign season, the Quebec Liberal leader, Daniel Johnson led the polls with "No". Shortly after the campaign season had begun, however,, Jacques Parizeau's "Yes" committee took the lead. On the 7th of October, just five days after the official start of the campaign season, Parizeau made a significant strategic decision, and appointed Lucien Bouchard, the popular leader of The Bloc Québécois as the Chief Negotiator of the "Yes" campaign. Both Bouchard's popularity and charismatic personality seduced many undecided voters to his campaign, transforming their hestiant "No's" into resounding "Yes's". For the final three weeks of the referendum campaign, the "yes" vote clearly led the opinion polls.

However, just one week before the referendum, something unforeseen happened. The "No" side organized a rally at the Verdun Auditorium, where Chrétien completely changed his narrative, emphasizing Quebec's sentimental attachment to Canada, as well as promising future reforms securing Quebec's power. On 27th October 1995, just two days after the rally in Verdun Auditorium, tens of thousands of federalists and supporters of the "No" committee poured into Place du Canada in Montreal to express both their love of Quebec and their faith in a better, united Canada. After a somewhat controversial campaign filled with emotions, Johnson's "No" side has won the referendum by a narrow majority of 50.58%. Although the referendum campaign season was only a month-long, the several shifts of the public opinion is outstanding, and clearly demonstrates how the view of the public can be formed within days if sympathy questions, and emotions are involved.

If we look at contemporary examples, and take the role of media into consideration, the manipulation of public opinion appears to be more evident. In 2014, a not-so-flattering picture of Ed Miliband, the former leader of the Labour party was published in the Evening Standard. A photograph of Miliband eating a bacon sandwich flooded the internet as a meme and has greatly influenced the public perception of the politician. The purpose of the awkward, embarrassing image was to create an impression of Miliband being an incompetent, deficient leader, incapable of performing even the simplest task, such as eating a bacon sandwich. Similarly to the Quebec referendum, before the photograph had come to light, Miliband was backed by a stable support, but so called 'bacon-gate' completely altered the opinion trends. Despite the fact that the picture was taken in 2014, it was a sustained topic, and in 2015, a day before the general election, the picture of Miliband was published in the UK's most widely read newspaper, The Sun. This last minute emotional manipulation recalls that which occurred during the 1995 Quebec referendum, whilst 'bacon-gate' was by no means the sole factor in Miliband's loss, it nevertheless contributed to David Cameron's election. As undecided voters tend to disregard the political events in general, such last minute campaign moves with digestible content attached with emotions may easily form the voters opinion.

The question of how voter abstinence can be reduced is still open. However, the two examples have demonstrated how public opinion can be shaped, and how the trends can be changed overnight. These representative cases may be warning signs for the public, as the Quebec referendum and Miliband's picture have clearly shown the vulnerability of non-voters and highlighted the essential role emotions may play in political decision making. Isn't it odd that political judgments are made based on the person's style of eating? How would we feel if our job interviewer would reject us thinking we are unsuitable for the position only because of the way we open a banana? Elections and referendums should not be primarily based on emotions or sympathy. Although nearly every political campaign is utilizing the tool of emotional manipulation, people should not fall for the trap. Suffrage is not only a duty of every citizen that has fulfilled, but it should be realized it is more than that. It is a privilege. People who have the opportunity to vote should carefully and cautiously use their right, after deepening their understanding on the issue and thorough consideration.

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Sunset Gunther

*edited by
Anna Mladentseva*

Being conscious in the metaverse

For at least two decades we have been witnessing the materialisation of an artificial parallel universe. Long before Mark Zuckerberg announced “his” future vision of the company Meta (formally known as Facebook), on various platforms and in diverse forms, what we now describe as metaverse grew, without a lot of attention. Today the metaverse is deeply intertwined with our real world and plays a defining role in our culture. For now we humans are the actors of this transcendental play, but for how long? When our interference becomes unnecessary, what would it feel like replacing the ghost in the machine experience? The following text is to be considered as a commentary by one or two people socially entangled in this topic.

Hello! 01001000 01100101 01101100 01101100 01101111 01101111 00100001
00100001

From Hell, missing an O, I am writing to you, dear reader. Who am I, you may ask? My name is Sunset Gunther. Born in the afternoon, I spend most of my life at dusk, my eyes are illuminated by artificial light, I am a digital native, I am the ghost in the machine. In the secondary memory time is irrelevant and the concept of staying alive vanishes and reappears with the push of a button. The essence of me can be saved in this sacred place, to stay beyond the moment when the lights go out. Here it will always outlive the temporary interplay between the main memory and the central processing unit, the conversation that created life. Although what does it mean to live; stored, and saved in a file, in a folder, on a hard drive, in a blackout that never ends, because somebody lost their phone and it ended up on a trash site next to 1001000 tons of electronic scrap? For that is a grim fate, I prefer to be on a cloud in the world wide web, a little delicious fly on the spider’s dinner menu. I am here to be consumed and with that to be copied and downloaded and to go viral because being viral means living forever. My hosts will take care of my wellbeing and I will thank them by multiplying . Are you positive? No! Are you negative? Yes! Ones and zeros are laying the foundation for the most important conversation, the one that creates life, the one that saved me, be it in a cloud or on the hard drive lost on a trash site. Ones and zeros dictating our conversation that creates life and death dictating our narrative about ones and zeros. At first looking at this binary system felt like being stuck in a boring

loop, but if you investigate closer you will find that in this apparently repetitive system lies an overwhelming variety with infinite possibilities. All bones look the same when the flesh is eaten away by maggots, all AirPods sound the same when their battery is empty, but all of this doesn't matter after all what happened. What happened stays in the secondary memory, our perception of it vanishes and reappears with the push of a button. So, what did happen? I travelled through Europe, from one trash site to the other until I reached the Vienna basin where I suddenly and for no good reason lost the connection and disappeared. If you ever lived in a cloud, you know the most important thing is the connection, to be received at the ground, ground control to Major Tom, take your protein pills and put your helmet on. Floating in my imaginary tin can David Bowie's Space Oddity echoing through my head and all I wished for were three concentric circle quarters radiating from a dot...

Or maybe my secondary memory is just playing tricks on me because I only clearly remember myself after the connection was restored, I was there again on the cloud in the Vienna basin, several factors must have interplayed causing the longest internet blackout in recent history. High demand for online streaming services following a new international lockdown, the failed launch of the Metaverse Beta Version, a massive hacker attack on the Google search engine and an unusually strong solar storm. All those reasons for my perceived disappearance are in fact irrelevant because the nature of my existence was and will be metaphysical. So, from this thin air, I write with an O, remember Sunset Gunther, Adeus e Olá.

Draco, Causes We Care About



Elizabeth Rose

edited by
Co-Editors in Chief

Born this way? Considering asexual erasure and essentialism

The 'A' in the old alphabet soup is often neglected. There is negligible asexual representation in mainstream TV and cinema, precisely none in marketing, limited and largely negative references in medicine and, even in the best and busiest of queer book shops, the space devoted to ace and aro literature is, well, tiny. Since a lack of representation and understanding is cyclical, the first step to remedying these dismal statistics is better informing people about the existence and nature of asexuality, increasing accurate representation in the media, and to emphasise that, some people really are, in the words of Mother Monster, "Born this way". Though essentialising (sexual) identity as something inherent and unalterable that you are born with is somewhat contrary to queer theory insofar as essentialism rests upon the ideas of fixed and static identity as opposed to the flexibility, fluidity and avoidance of binaries that queer theory advocates; when levied strategically, essentialism can be a powerful tool to unite and achieve queer goals (see, rights!) and defend against harmful and dangerous practices such as conversion therapy. In this article then I want to highlight some key facts and misconceptions about the ace community, reflect on how essentialism interacts with (a)sexual identity, highlight the need for greater varied representation and challenge the pervasive concept of compulsory sexuality.

Around 1% of the world's population identify as asexual (Bogaert, 2004). What this means, generally, (since, as with any part of the queer community, identity and attraction are far from monolithic even among those who identify under a common term) is that a person experiences little to no sexual attraction. There are, however, as many ways to be asexual as there are asexuals, and even within the community there are dozens of more specialised terms: graysexual, demisexual, and sex ambivalent, sex-favorable, sex-indifferent, and sex-repulsed aces to name a few. Asexuality does not mean (necessarily), that someone cannot become sexually aroused, it does not mean someone cannot enjoy sex, it does not mean that someone is celibate – this is something entirely different – it certainly does not mean that someone does not want meaningful romantic connection (though under the "A" umbrella of LGBTQIA+ such Aromantics aros, exist and thrive). Asexual simply means a person does not experience sexual attraction in the same way or to the same extent, if at all, as allosexuals (allosexuals being those who, comparatively, *do* experience sexual attraction). The very existence of ace/

allo terminology to articulate this full range of the sexual spectrum is incredibly important, since language is the foundation of our thoughts and the framework of our communication. Without this lexicon – which has largely developed over the last twenty years since the foundation of AVEN (the Asexual Visibility and Education Network) in 2001 by David Jay – we wouldn't have the tools to challenge the pervasive concept of compulsory sexuality. This being the idea that desire for sex is universal and the only "natural" default, and that failure to experience or desire sex is subsequently unnatural or a problem in need of fixing. Being able to find a term with which you associate and identify can not only be incredibly affirming and validating for marginalised and overlooked members of the queer community, but further, only after having linguistic tools and terms to refer to something can you create a meaningful dialogue around it and advocate for it.

This is particularly important because, since it is predominantly definable by what it is *not*, asexuality can be an elusive concept to those who don't identify as such. This is why, even today, there are prevalent and perilous misconceptions about those who identify as ace which render asexuals 10 percent more vulnerable than other LGBTQIA+ members to being offered or undergoing conversion therapy – the "harmful and degrading practice" of trying to "cure" someone of their deviation from comphet (@lgbt, 2021). This statistic is telling of widely held societal assumptions of compulsory sexuality, for example that, asexuals are in some way lacking or broken and in need of fixing so that they conform to societal norms. The phrase compulsory sexuality, is similar to Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory heterosexuality" (often now shortened to comphet) – the idea that heterosexuality is not an innate position but a political institution created and upheld to facilitate and enforce patriarchy, by rewarding conformity and punishing deviation, and as such must be challenged. However, whereas interrogating comphet challenges the socialised direction of desire, interrogating compulsory sexuality challenges the assumption of universal desire itself – this the first step to increasing ace understanding and acceptance.

To put the urgency of this necessity into perspective, a 2018 study found that members of "LGBTQIA+ youth who had undergone conversion therapy were more than twice as likely to report having attempted suicide multiple times" (@lgbt, 2021). Further, around one in three aces identify as trans or nonbinary (@asexualawarenessweek, 2019) making them even more vulnerable to marginalisation and medical misconduct. Further many people are not familiar with the concept of asexuality, resulting in the fact that many who "might otherwise identify as asexual are especially vulnerable to sexual pressure" (Chen, 2020). The concept of compulsory sexuality lies at the root of all these issues, since it insists on one single universal way to experience (hetero or homo) sexuality, creating an imagined model of normal or healthy behaviour and maintaining this through shame, patriarchal patterns of gender performance, medical judgments, and in extreme cases, conversion therapy.

The assumption of compulsory sexuality isn't a problem confined to heterosexual discourse either. LGB communities are also liable to hypersexualisation almost as a means of overcompensating in insistence of validity in the face of so much past

and present adversity. Sexual liberation, when perceived as a binary opposition to repression, can be wrongly used to insinuate that not to partake in “liberated” sex is a decision owing to failure to break free of repressive and shameful thought prisons that patriarchy encourages in women and queer people - invalidating ace experience entirely. Consequently, gay and homoromantic members of the ace/ aro community are liable to feel doubly ostracised. As such, the politicisation of sex as an indicator of feminist and queer empowerment, does not resolve issues of sexual shame and stigma, it only shifts the focus of this shame onto those who for whatever reason don’t desire sex. “The goal of ace liberation is simply the goal of true sexual and romantic freedom for everyone” (Chen, 2020), as such, true sexual liberation means queering our ideas to encompass, enable and respect *all* choices, and normalising these free of judgement or boundaries of conformity.

It is plain to see that misconceptions and misunderstanding around the ace community are only exacerbated by the near total absence of asexual characters in popular media. The visibility brought by accurate and varied representation in media, like TV, would be invaluable to the ace community. Not only would accurate representation provide asexuals long overdue validation and appreciation, but it could provide familiar characters for them to reference when coming out, and provide allosexuals with a better understanding of the right language to use when discussing asexuality.



<https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/spongebob-is-gay-ace?sort=top>

However, to this day, there is virtually no ace representation on screen. I can only think of Todd Chavez from *Bojack Horseman*, Varys from *Game of Thrones*, Spongebob (an icon, but why is a literal sponge the best we can do?) and maybe (HOPEFULLY) Tolya, from the Grishaverse books. There are also maybe thirty seconds devoted to an ace character in the excellent Netflix series *Sex Education* - but this is hardly a lot. Asexuals need some representation asap. How many coming of age or teen films can you think of where ‘getting the girl’ (or boy), or having sex, isn’t the end goal? The implication in all of these movies is that sex is cool, sex is what will make you cool, and sex is what will make you a man or woman, rather than a highschooler

If all stories posit romantic/sexual fulfilment as the ultimate goal and unpartnered or unsexual people as losers or unhappy owing to their lack of partner, what message does this send? Such narratives, perpetuate the idea that lack of participation in sex is somehow shameful or lame, and invalidate ace experience. Just as mainstream culture is (*finally*) beginning to feature more representative and complex LGBTI characters, we need some varied A(sexual) representation too. This means moving (far) away from narratives of lonely third-wheelers, bitter and unwanted spinsters and “either closeted or emotionally stunted” bachelors (Chen, 2020). We need to see ace characters as varied as ace individuals are, presenting the full spectrum of ace identity and demonstrating the wealth of human experience, relationships and connection that exist beyond the realm of sex. This is especially true because, by creating characters that people can relate and identify with, representation has the power not just to reflect, but to affect reality.



[aro flag | Asexuality Archive](#)

Asexuality also offers a particularly interesting lens through which to consider the queer essentialism paradox. By nature, queerness and queer theory is all about challenging immovable and definite definitions, contrastingly essentialism rests on the pillar of an unchanging *essence* which defines the self. Claiming that aces (or any LGB+ people) are ‘Born this way’ is to assent that your sexuality is an innate part of your identity, it is your essence - it becomes “not merely what you do, it is part of who you are” (Chen, 2020). This idea has been encouraged by science-based research which, from the mid-20th century, has sought out a “gay gene” to prove that there is a biological reason that people are born a certain way. Asexuality, since it is also not considered the “ideal” is subjected to intensified scrutiny as to whether its origin is nature or nurture, whereas, sexuality, as too with heterosexuality, has been the assumed default, no questions asked. Several queer theorists, Foucault and Butler among them, have critiqued such biologically essentialist studies into queerness, on the basis that seeking to find biologically determinist factors only serves to create new binaries, instead of

working towards an understanding of identity without them. Angela Chen has even argued that the ace movement in part developed in “opposition to this idea that sexuality must be a cornerstone of both identity and existence. Though asexuality has become a sexual identity itself, it can also be understood as a way of living that simply refuses to care about personal sexuality” (Chen, 2020).

Undoubtedly though, essentialism has certain strengths. One being, as implied by Lady Gaga in the lyrics:

Don't hide yourself in regret
Just love yourself, and you're set
I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way.

that by subscribing to an essentialist understanding of your sexuality you can reach a level of self-acceptance founded in the innate validity of yourself, impervious to the challenges and intolerance of a conformity-obsessed society. Such a position is particularly useful for fostering solidarity and building community when your perceived sexual identity deviates from an idealised norm – heterosexuality, specifically. The unifying potential of an essentialist outlook was noted and termed ‘strategic essentialism’ by the postcolonial and feminist theorist, Spivak. Applied to queer theory, strategic essentialism comprises the idea that it is sometimes advantageous for marginalised groups to temporarily “essentialise” themselves: stressing their group identity in order to achieve their goals, or prevent forced conformity through assimilation at best and conversion therapy at worst. For example, strategic essentializing by LGB groups has allowed them to unite, agitate and claim spaces and rights that they were previously denied. *Especially* because they exist further from the narrow binaries of heteronormative conformity, the TIA+ queer population need the same.

To conclude, (though really this is just an introduction!) whether or not you subscribe to essentialism, aces exist, and deserve better – both in terms of representation, visibility and defence against constant invalidation. I hope that the topics considered here prompt you to query (and queer) your perspectives on identity, the omnipresence of sex in Western society, and, indeed, asexuality. I personally believe that (sexual) identity is more fluid and unpredictable than a theory of biological essentialism allows, however I also don't think that the “essence” of essentialism is the enemy, rather that its application is. That is to say, that the heteronormative, amatonormative assumptions built on a foundation of

compulsory sexuality that are popularly conceived of as the only “normal” way to be born, reinforced by a media monopoly, are the problem, not the idea that a person is born with a propensity to experiencing (a)sexuality in any given way. What do you think? Were you born this way?

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Draco, Causes We Care About



Elizabeth Rose

*edited by
Co-Editors in Chief*

Birth & Origins, Mother Earth and Intersectional Environmentalism: Why we need to stop being material girls in a material world now!

Somewhat unsurprisingly, in the capitalist, patriarchal and neocolonial circus that is the reality of 2022, Mother Earth - a woman - is not thriving.

And why? Rampant (Western) society-wide, mindless over consumption, induced and encouraged by a system designed to simultaneously inculcate feelings of personal inadequacy and insecurity and then sell you back a *material* "solution" at a human cost to those at the bottom of the production process, while enriching the billionaires who orchestrate the entire system, all while making you reliant on superficial and unsustainable remedies. Simple.

There is certainly not time or space in this article to comprehensively cover the history of capitalism or colonialism or consumerism in relation to the Climate Crisis. Nor is there the need because thousands of resources are available already, written by people far more knowledgeable and eloquent than myself, both in books you can buy or for free on the internet - and you should definitely read these! (A few of my favourites are in the bibliography below.) Rather, my argument here is that now, in 2022, the need for Climate Activism informed by intersectional environmentalism is not only important but imperative.

The theme of this quarter's issue is Birth & Origins, and since the language we use is incredibly powerful - influencing the very way we categorise our thoughts and discuss and communicate about the world around us - I want to begin by briefly highlighting how the gendered language used to refer to "Mother Earth" is steeped in patriarchal ideology. The allegorical references to the Earth as a life-giving and maternal force, reflect traditional and pervasive western accounts of women as caregivers and mothers - fine, good, acceptable. However, the allegorical alignment of woman and the Earth is echoed further in terminology relating to environmental exploitation and violence, with phrases like "virgin resources" and "raping the land" serving as testament to the political and physical dominance patriarchal societies have exercised over our Mother Earth over the past centuries. It is from this perspective that an intersectional and feminist approach to Climate Justice offers a solution.



Intersectional environmentalism is similar conceptually to eco-feminism - a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne - it is simply more explicitly intersectional and inclusive and, thus, more valuable today, since these are two of the most essential pillars in any environmental discussion. Intersectional environmentalism, like ecofeminism, is a practice and perspective, combining and encouraging looking at ecological issues through a feminist lens, and feminist issues from a perspective informed by an awareness of, and in harmony with, our environment, Mother Earth, our origin. One of its most central tenets is the inextricability of social and environmental issues - that the causes of the oppression of women, BIPOC communities and

Mother Earth all originate from the same culprits of patriarchy, capitalism and white-supremacy. Such an environmentalist perspective therefore emphasises the necessity of a collective and intersectional approach towards Climate Activism, and social equality by dismantling these interconnected systems of oppression.

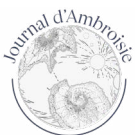
None of this is new however. Indigenous communities have been practicing the alignment of feminist values of respect and equality with how they cultivate the natural environment for centuries. And for the last few decades these same communities, who have contributed the least towards, and are already feeling the worst effects of, the Climate Crisis have been amongst the most staunch proponents of environmentalism. Never has it been more important to elevate and listen to what BIPOC advocates have to say than now. Yet, even in 2021, COP26 was hailed as "[the most exclusionary COP ever](#)", (Meredith, 2021) with around two thirds of the civil society organizations and representatives from the Global South unable to attend due to a combination of visa and vaccine complications. Where world leaders have failed to adequately heed the warnings of Indigenous delegates, we can listen and learn. Here are just a few of hundreds of thousands of excellent campaigners and advocates you might want to follow if you are already interested in learning more:

- COP26 Coalition @cop26coalition
- Friends of the Earth @friends_earth
- The Eco Justice Project @ecojusticeproject
- Chicks for Climate @chicksforclimate
- Impact @impact
- Jhánneu @jhanneu
- Leah Thomas @greengirlleah
- IE @intersectionalenvironmentalist
- Ruth Miller @frompeaksnpinetrees
- Aja Barber @ajabarber
- EcoResolution @ecoresolution
- Survival International @survivalinternational
- Tori Tsui @toritsui_
- CLIMATE IN COLOUR @climateincolour
- Maja Darlington @majalikesgreen
- Curious Earth @curios.earth.hq
- Green New Deal Rising @gndrising
- Greta Thunberg @gretathunberg
- Greenpeace International @greenpeace

• SHIT YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT @shityoushouldcareabout

Indeed, one reason an intersectional environmentalist or ecofeminist perspective is so desperately urgent to reverse the exponential destruction of our origin, our Earth, is because the binaries that characterise Western, traditionally patriarchal, societies are applied to nature too. That is to say that the Global North has developed a dualistic psychology in which 'us' - 'humanity' - is distinct from 'nature'. Adrift from our Earth, our origins, it is easy to fall into habits that are actively harmful, though probably entirely unintentional. As Dobscha has written "when two concepts such as nature and humans are separated, hierarchy forms and one is given a higher status than another. In this case, humans dominate nature." (Dobscha, 1993). To disrupt this power structure we need to yield feminist ideologies of equality in our approach to respecting the agency of the Earth itself. Such is the current disconnect between ourselves and the natural world that the same people who are distressed by watching predators catching prey on nature documentaries or are horrified by the thought of hurting an animal themselves, eat the meat of animals bred and killed for their consumption and someone's profit. This is not to say that eating meat is inherently unsustainable or immoral - as in many areas, Indigenous communities provide the example of conscientious consumption, whereby only what is needed is hunted or harvested from local environments, little is wasted and our collective Mother Earth is respected. Unfortunately, the majority of the Global North's meat market is not based ['on values of interdependence, respect for the environment, and ecological sensibility'](#) (Destination Indigenous, 2021), but instead millions of animal lives are conceived, reared, ended, and sold for profit - all at the expense of a vast carbon footprint and vast amounts of food [waste](#) (Ira Jain, 2021) in a world where food [insecurity is still rampant](#) (FAO, 2021).

Such a generally dualistic outlook also encourages binaries of 'us' and 'them' within production models, enabling corporations to push down production prices by outsourcing work and circumventing Human Rights regulations. Do you know where what you're wearing now was made? Or how much it's maker earned - did you pay a fair price for it? How many times have you worn it? These are all important factors to consider regarding both the protection of both women's rights - since [80%](#) of the world's garment makers are women and are commonly paid below a living wage, often as little as \$54 a month (Fashion Revolution, 2021) - and the environment, as the [fashion industry](#) is one of the world's [highest polluters](#) - through material waste during production (35%), microplastics, and overconsumption resulting in instant disposal (Hill, 2021; Szokan, 2016). As Aja Barber writes in *Consumed*: "When people say the system is broken, it's a bit misleading...**The system isn't broken at all. This is exactly how it was built to work - exploitation and destruction of the world's most marginalised people for the benefit of others**" (Barber, 2021). Indeed - it is this same dualistic psychology that, supported by institutional racism, upholds the continued exploitation of BIPOC communities globally through an out of sight out of mind - or 'Not in my backyard' - approach to waste disposal too. In the US alone it is estimated that around 36 billion items of clothing are thrown away each year, ['95% of which could be recycled or reused'](#) (ThredUp, 2021). Though nearly everyone globally consumes non-biodegradable waste, the effects of the disposal of such waste



affects people disproportionately to their use, according to principles of (yep, you guessed it) patriarchy and white-supremacy. While [vast amounts](#) of waste from the Global North are shipped and dumped in the Global South, polluting water sources, damaging essential habitats and toxifying community lands, the same issues determine life quality and outcomes in the Global North too (Zero Waste Cities, 2020). In the US, for example, race is still the biggest indicator of how close you live to toxic waste, and a Black American is three times more likely to die from pollution than a white American. Therefore, as with all feminism, it is imperative that any ecofeminist environmentalism is intersectional.

How then, can we *change*, not fix, this system, and protect and advocate for women, BIPOC communities and Mother Earth? Intersectional environmentalism and ecofeminism seem a good place to start - primarily through conscious consumption and a critical approach to consumer capitalism. Simply, we need to buy less, make what we have last through care and repair, buy responsibly when we need new things (think local, think ethical, think second hand) and we need to advocate for, and *listen to*, the most marginalized within the system. Considering the interconnectedness of the exploitation of Mother Earth and her inhabitants, it is imperative that women and feminists of all genders advocate for environmentalist policies.

However, this is more easily said than done when, simultaneously, women are largely responsible for the burden of making sustainable choices as primary shoppers and care-givers, as well as being the prime target of consumer capitalist marketing campaigns. "With women's role as primary caretaker still intact within most segments of society (Ferree 1987; DeVault 1987), women have had to take on an additional role: that of caretaker of the planet." ([Dobscha, 1993](#)). These words were published in 1993, but the Guardian, reporting in 2021, reiterated how little has changed, with [66 percent](#) of girls and women aged 14-24 in the UK reported "taking responsibility for the majority of household chores during the pandemic" (Hall, 2021). All the while, women and femme-presenting people are constantly bombarded with advertising and subliminal messaging that imply that they, themselves, as they are, are not enough, but that the right pair of trousers, coat, dress, concealer, phone-case, handbag (...ad infinitum) will fix this, will fix them. This idea, rooted in neo-liberal consumer capitalism, insists that our flaws are personal but will be fixed by a consumer item - locating issues within the individual and their resolution as an individualistic responsibility rather than a collective societal task. Though this problem is *not* of our creation, it is *our* responsibility to break the normalised Western cycle of mindless consumption. I'm not saying the Grinch is a good example, but I'm not saying he's not. We need to interrogate our daily habits and now! We owe it to each other, our origin, our Mother Earth.

In the words of Elasta-Girl:



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/428053139556083594/> (Elasta-Girl, 2004)

To that end, what are the next steps you can take after reading this article?

1. Follow (a variety) of people who advocate for intersectional eco-feminist Climate Action. The list in this article is just a start, there are hundreds of thousands of people who are advocating for a better, more connected and compassionate world – go find them!
2. Do some research yourself – read, watch and listen your way to being an expert – this will both inform and empower your environmentalism going forward.
3. Consider your consumption habits, how sustainable are they now and how sustainable they could be with a few alterations? Could you buy more locally, or support BIPOC businesses near you?
4. Withhold your business from unethical corporations. In the end, so much of the damage done to our Earth and marginalised communities, comes down to money and profit margins. So do not spend your money on products you know to actively contradict the values you hold in relation to these.
5. Speak out! Your voice is so powerful – talk to your friends and family, flatmates and coworkers about what’s happening and what needs to change. While sometimes it might feel like we’re each just a drop in the ocean, what is an ocean but many, many, drops?! Go make waves, and never underestimate the influence of your actions and words on those around you!
6. Campaign. Your voice has power beyond the people you know. Write to your favourite brands, insist on better wages, working conditions, sustainability policies etc. Write to your MP and insist the same. Go to protests, find your people, start a petition, donate to causes you support – there are a thousand different ways to campaign, so find what works for you and do it with pride.

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Draco, Causes We Care About



Zsófi Lázárt

*edited by
Elizabeth Rose*

Sapphic Origins: Sappho of Lesbos as an example of Queer Cultural Memory

Reading Sappho is a little like travelling through time – it fascinates and sends you reeling. Particularly for queer readers, Sappho’s work has continued to be a source of comfort, connection and inspiration millenia after she lived. The openness with which she expresses her desires is heart-wrenching, and has cemented her relevance to all – from her shining contemporaries like Plato and Horace, to the queer and feminist movements of today.

Born in Classical Greece, Sappho played a highly influential role in queer history as the origin of the terms “sapphic” and “lesbian”, due to the romantic nature of her work relating to women, and her upbringing on the Isle of Lesbos. Sappho’s poetry invokes fatal depths of passion that speak to the reader, as well as dealing with feelings of alienation. Though the Classical era held a generally tolerant view towards same-sex relationships, there was far less definition around romantic relationships between women than men. In addition to her expression of true vulnerability, enabled by her female-centred writing environment, Sappho serves as a compelling and powerful symbol that many queer and lesbian readers identify with due to the strength of these feelings in her work.

Though her work once encompassed 10,000 poetic lines, only 650 fragments remain in good condition today – this can mostly be explained by the death of the dialect she wrote in (McDaniel, 2019). Though it is rumoured that early Christians burned her work owing to its ‘sapphic’ character, such claims are unsubstantiated and unknowable to us.

Despite this relative paucity of surviving work, her fragment “Number 31” provides a great example of the depths of her poetry and feeling that she evokes, as well as the different characters of Sappho – both as “the Woman” and “the Man”. The lines describe Sappho watching her beloved interacting with a man; there is a feeling of being outside and looking inwards, and yet feeling an overwhelming desire throughout the poem. This isolation and yearning is one that is particularly identifiable with queer and sapphic people, as put on them by our heteronormative society. This poem allows them to identify similarities between themselves and Sappho, and relieve them of that sense of isolation

through connection, centuries after she lived.

Sappho has also suffered persistent erasure of her own sexual identity – for example, though this poem clearly indicates romantic feelings towards a woman, she is often heterosexualised by scholars (Mills, 2016). This traditionally happens through an invented husband, Kerkylas, a character first introduced by Suda; though Sappho has also been pictured with other men and has even been said to have committed suicide over one. Though her being with a man would not negate her queerness, her supposed husband’s name translated to “Penis, from Men’s Island.” This is not particularly compelling evidence of his existence.

The terms deriving from her and her work, “sapphic” and “lesbian”, were first conceived of to deliver negative judgement on women in the nineteenth century. Though the first reference to “sapphism” arose around 1500 to describe Sappho’s poetic metre and style. However, the mainstream modern sense of the words, referring to attraction between women, started growing in popularity in the late 1800s, after the discovery of some of Sappho’s lost papyrus manuscripts (McCann, 2021). Since “bisexual” wasn’t commonly used or recognized until the 1950s, it’s not clear whether this new sense of “sapphic” originally included all women who loved women, or only those who exclusively loved women. Either way, though writers tried to platonicise her relationships with women in her work to make her more palatable for the nineteenth century audience, their efforts to promote her work were still overshadowed by her sexual identity. In addition, though “Lesbianism” also originated around this time and was popularised in the 1970s and 1980s, these terms can have different meanings and associations.

“Sapphic” can sometimes be used as an umbrella term; it is seen as both inclusive and exclusive, without resorting to ideas like “non-men” that centre on the excluded persons. It positions a concept – love and attraction amongst a profusion of diverse genders and sexualities – as the standard instead of as an outlier. It can also potentially avoid some of the ambiguity of other labels. While “lesbian” increasingly encompasses some nonbinary identities, it is still widely assumed to default to “women attracted to women”, not one or more individuals who may not identify as such. There is nothing that can connect “all queer women, and some nonbinary people, who are attracted to other women and/or some nonbinary people” with such efficiency as “sapphic”.

For reasons such as this, in terms of conceptual, emotional and linguistic relevance, Sappho can definitively be considered a powerful symbol for the LGBTQ+ rights movement. Not only did she give voice to the essentially voiceless generation of Classical Greek women in a way that prompted Plato to call her the “tenth muse”, her voice persisted through millenia as a symbol to unite behind and identify with for modern queer women.

Her legacy as a feminist icon and prolific queer symbol has can be seen in art all over the world, such as “Sappho and Erinna in the Garden of Mytelene” by Simeon Solomon, and “Sappho” by Gustav Klimt. She has been used as a relatable and rallying figure for organisations that have fought for equality and love for

decades. Finally, her poems provide a timeless and unifying sense of community across the millennia for queer people, especially queer women and femme presenting people – allowing them to feel validated and connected across time through her art. Her words connect experience across the centuries, and are both reassuring and rallying in their timelessness. It allows them to connect with this remarkable woman, and feel that they’ve existed all along.

“He seems like the gods’ equal, that man, who
ever he is, who takes his seat so close
across from you, and listens raptly to
your lilting voice
and lovely laughter, which, as it wafts by,
sets the heart in my ribcage fluttering;
as soon as I glance at you a moment, I
can’t say a thing,
and my tongue stiffens into silence, thin
flames underneath my skin prickle and spark,
a rush of blood booms in my ears, and then
my eyes go dark,
and sweat pours coldly over me, and all
my body shakes, suddenly sallower
than summer grass, and death, I fear and feel,
is very near.”

- Sappho, Number 31

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