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ANTHROPOLOGY

**WHAT MAKES US HUMAN? ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE AND SOCIAL FUTURES**

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Is there anybody out there? Are we alone in the universe, or are there other intelligent life forms in habitable zones on distant or nearby stars? The human quest for transcendence employs science, technology, myth, and artistic visions to enhance human existence on Earth. But what makes us human?

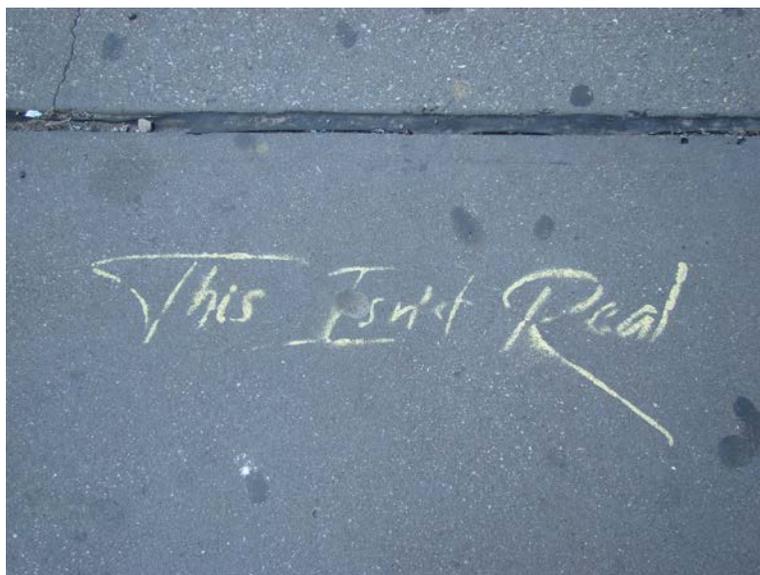
EDITORS' NOTE

How is Artificial Intelligence impacting what it means to be human?

The quarantine following a global pandemic and related market shutdown physically isolated many around the world. Technology provided a means for staying connected, for continuing our work (at least for some), for political organizing, as a reprieve from confinement, as well as a basic window into the world, and more. Last semester, one of our students contemplated political mobilizing and activism in light of social media and social influencers in this publication, leading to queries about the role of technology in our everyday lives. We questioned the usual association of artificial intelligence with science fiction considering how technology so thoroughly shapes our world and ways of being—subjects fully in the realm of anthropology—leading to this issue's theme. What is the impact of impersonal machines on social interactions, on communication, on our sense of ourselves, and the nature of community life?

The incomparable Black science fiction author, Octavia Butler, offers us a means for remaking humanity. Her use of concepts of hybridity to undermine hierarchical social thinking detrimental to a fundamental human sense of biophilia, a love for all organisms, presents a guide for understanding human experience. This issue considers what it means to be human by exploring our engagement with machines in different contexts from art and literature to a dehumanizing colonial past and brutal historical genocide that benefitted from industrial machinery for exterminating on a massive scale, in order to generate further dialogue about our ever-changing relationships with the tools we create.

The Editors



Deep Thoughts: Wisdom can be found scrawled on NYC streets.

Will There Be an AI Takeover of the Creative Arts? My Answer: Most Likely Not

By Molly Skillman



Allow me to set the scene.

You're an artist, a rather acclaimed one at that. You spend years upon years studying both the major and the fine skills of art. You put substantial amounts of time, money, resources, and thought into your pieces. The state fair comes around, and you decide to enroll in the art competition. You have spent days, maybe even weeks, completing your piece. No doubt it is blue ribbon worthy. However, when the awards are handed out, you only receive second place. The first-place winner's piece is entitled "The House at the End of the Road, by DALL-E 2".

You may think, "What an interesting pseudonym!", but after doing some research into this DALL-E 2, you realize this is no pseudonym.

It's an artificial intelligence programmed to create vast pieces of art.

Too unrealistic? You may be shocked that this situation is actually all too real for many new age artists.

On September 2, 2022, Kevin Roose of the *New York Times* reported "This year, the Colorado State Fair's annual art competition gave out prizes in all the usual categories: painting, quilting, sculpture. But one entrant, Jason M. Allen of Pueblo West, Colorado, didn't make his entry with a brush or a lump of clay. He created it with Midjourney, an artificial intelligence program that turns lines of text into hyper-realistic graphics."¹

Jason M. Allen went on to win the blue-ribbon prize, along with \$300. When the State Fair shared the news on Twitter, commenters were not thrilled.

What makes us human in a world full of technological advances is the ability to create art.

¹ To view Jason Allen's A.I.-generated work, *Théâtre D'opéra Spatial*, follow the link to the *NYTimes* source cited in the references.

“We’re watching the death of artistry unfold right before our eyes,” one Twitter user wrote. “This is so gross,” another wrote. ‘I can see how A.I. art can be beneficial, but claiming you’re an artist by generating one? Absolutely not’”, Roose states.

It’s terrifying to think that technology has now advanced enough for AIs to be a part of every creative field. AIVA and JukeBox are AI programmed music generators, where one single word can create a song within minutes. Rytr and Jasper can write complex stories and blog posts with just a simple prompt within seconds. Now, there are the art AIs, DALL–E 2 and Midjourney, that can take a simple word or sentence and create wonderful masterpieces in the same amount of time it takes for a google search to go through.

Drew Gooden, a famous YouTuber said in his video entitled *Using AI to Write a YouTube Video*, “There’s something very dystopian about technology like this [Artificial Intelligence]. It’s a stark reminder that there are so many things that humans seem to be uniquely capable of that could possibly be replicated by a computer program.”



A photo created in 30 seconds using DALL–E 2 with the prompt “A ghost drinking a root beer in the style of Junji Ito”. Image created by author.

It feels as though these new AI programs are erasing a key component of the human species.

However, I don’t believe this to be the case.

What makes us human in a world full of technological advances is the ability to create art. Art that is personable, art that is relatable. Only humans can create art that resonates with the soul. You may look at a piece of AI generated art and feel a sense of relation, but nothing will ever compare to witnessing a real-life Michelangelo or Monet. Below is the real *Starry Night* and an AI generated *Starry Night*.



The first image is Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*, painted in 1889 during his stay at the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole near Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. Although it’s not known how long it took to complete, art professionals believe it

was created over his 12 months stay at the asylum. He painted this during multiple fits of hallucinations, paranoia, and suicide attempts. It depicts inner emotional and mental struggles. This is the first of his paintings using blue as a core color, which resembled his bout of sadness and self-doubt. The second image I typed into DALL-E 2 and it only took 30 seconds to complete. I was in my bedroom and was in the mindset of “I wonder what’s for dinner”.

That is the key difference between human art and AI art. Artists already have in mind what colors they will use to present a certain emotion, what brush strokes will elicit a certain feeling, what frame of mind they’re in and how it will reflect onto the canvas. All of these components are what makes human art real art.

Of course, this is not to say that AI generated art isn’t a form of real art, but it’s nowhere near comparable with the likes of what humans can do. If you find enjoyment in creative, interesting, and sometimes peculiar pieces of art, then AI programs may be your calling.

Molly Skillman is a second-year student majoring in Forensic Psychology at John Jay College and is enrolled in Prof. Melissa Zavala’s class PSY 210-05 Sex and Culture, Fall 2022.

However, to put an AI programmed piece against a human piece of art, and claim you put in the same amount of work as the human painting, that’s when it’s no longer considered real art.

Art derives from the emotions of the creator. That’s what separates humans from AI. That’s why I think there will be no overthrowing of the human art world. No one’s job will be replaced by a computer program. It’s as simple as that. Computers lack the empathy necessary to create a masterpiece.

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Killer Robots, Death to Humanity?

By Melissa Zavala



I did not grow up obsessed with *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*. I watched the latter as a child but was not enthralled by it as I was with *Star Trek*—except that fascination came with young adulthood. It was not space travel or the futurist aesthetic that captured my imagination, nor the alien societies and cultures, which do captivate! I was instead drawn in by the normality of a future so acutely balanced. With the capitalist system toppled, everyone's needs are met, and the future is open wide to learning from others and cooperating for the greater good. The Federation of Planets is collaborative, humans have learned from past mistakes and have a non-interference policy, and technology supports an orderly world. This was a future I could get on board with! But this vision always stood in stark contrast with another one of my childhood delights which I loved before *Star Trek*: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1984). Having read it in High School, this novel shaped my sense of the dangers of a mechanized future, where fetuses grow in test tubes, and people live mostly by bread and circus, maintained in a shallow state of contentment. There may be ways to disentangle the differences between utopian and dystopian visions, but they seem to work best together in all of their contradictions (as do most things in life). Anthropology brings much nuance to these visions. As a result,

engaging Bruno Latour's ideas on modernity, I ask: how is the proliferation of machines refashioning our social worlds today?

How can we engage with technological change in a way that enriches all of the features that make us uniquely human animals?



Space—the final frontier: Starfleet officers are scientists and scholars on a peaceful mission to explore and assist in alliance-building across galaxies.

Throughout his works, Latour critiques distinctions between nature and society. He does this in different ways, thus underscoring the hybridity of various things, from computer chips to Monsanto products, politics and science, among others, as he does in his book on modernity. In doing this, he undermines the traditional dualistic thinking at the basis of European philosophical traditions. He refers to the hybrids he analyzes as *monsters*, *tricksters*, and *cyborgs* (the last term is, however, more

closely associated with Donna Haraway's work [1985]). In thinking about the relationships between categories and fields, Latour also separates intention from misinterpretation or misuse. In *Aramis or the Love of Technology* (1996), in another example, Latour grounds his analysis of the misuse of technology in a discussion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). One of his key points revolves around the problem with Dr. Frankenstein's creation: it is neither the monster nor the march of technological progress but a lack of understanding of the power of new technologies combined with the public's lack of engagement with scientific works that makes for a true challenge then. The relevance of this critique strongly resonates now.



What social attributes get lost along with wages when workers are displaced by machines?

Today, we vigorously engage with technology in its various forms, transforming us in different ways. Sometimes, our devices shelter us from the world, as cell phones enrapture us with all they can do beyond

making phone calls, isolating us in our individualized worlds. We become unpaid workers at retail shops operating self-serve check-out counters. We can easily become consumed consumers, participants in a world of robots and artificial intelligence in ways that both enhance and jeopardize our social ties to one another. Much like the ongoing conflict between utopian and dystopian futures, our engagement with technology produces mixed effects. How can we engage with technological change in a way that enriches all of the features that make us uniquely human animals? Approximating more of a utopian future will require us to draw more from a cyborg model to create a coalition of affinity in order to avoid disunity and displacement.

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Muselmänner, The Human

By Sofija Grandakovska



Without the strength to remember,
Empty are her eyes, cold her womb,
Like a frog in winter [...]
—Primo Levi, *If This is a Man*

Mieczyslaw Koscielniak, a Polish painter, while being a prisoner in Auschwitz–Birkenau, with the number 15261 tattooed on his arm, in 1944, drew the figure of the Muselmänner [Muselmann, Muslim] in pencil and ink on cardboard. From the lines of this drawing, one can only see a silhouette-man. Following the camp dictionary, this silhouette-man refers to the Jew turned into a Muslim in Auschwitz, denoting the image of a dehumanized person transformed into a moving skeleton, the living-dead. Primo Levi's work,² an account of his personal experience in Auschwitz, teaches us that the Muselmänner is *the [complete] demolition of a man*.³ Muselmänner equates to alienation from the human ability to utter a word, to leave a testimony of one's condition. It is the human who remains permanently drawn away from his/her universal obligation—to *speak*. So, the Muselmänner in—loneliness—dies and disappears, leaving no trace in anyone's memory.⁴

² In particularly refer to, *If This is a Man* [Se questo è un uomo (1947) (also published as *Survival in Auschwitz* in the United States)] and *The Drowned and the Saved* [I sommersi e i salvati] (1986)].



Mieczyslaw Koscielniak, *Muselmann*, 1944, KL Auschwitz, 16 x 12 cm, ink on paper. © The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

The distinction between the so-called *true witness* or the one who does not return, and the *survivor* as a witness, as made by Primo Levi, teaches us that the survivor is not a true witness, for true witnesses are those who do not survive. Namely, the base of Levi's declaration indicates that the survivor could not testify for the personal experience of those who never returned and bears a hint of the complete demolition of a man. The thing that is *missing* in survivor testimonies is the very thing that *burdens*. The experience beyond the humane is the experience of the true witness. Here, we name it: the impossible witness. The Muselmänner.

***The thing that is missing in
survivor testimonies is the very
thing that burdens.***

³ Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "Primo Levi: The survivor as victim", *The end of the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 185-212.

⁴ Примо Леви, *Дали е ова човек* [Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*] (Скопје: Сигмапрес, 2012), 91.

Relatedly, it is worth pointing out what historian Yehuda Bauer teaches us about the image of the dehumanized one, the *Muselmänner*. This image offers a description of acts of humiliation and oppression brought to an extreme, whereas the “victim is deprived of any personality and self-feeling of shame, of his/her personal name, individuality, family relations, control of his/her corporal functions and is reduced to an automatic ‘dead man walking’; The *Muselmänner* presents a loss of absolute relation with the everyday ethical perceptions”.⁵ However, the nature of the image of the dehumanised is not inexplicable and unrepresentable since it represents a reflexion of the very core of the euphemism of the Final Solution, which represents the exact thing it strives to hide. Namely, *the true witness*.

In this context, Yehuda Bauer stresses the duality of executioner-victim. Descriptions of the Holocaust are extreme since they represent “the depth of the human perversity and the unprecedented brutality of the e.g., phantasmagorical motivation for the racial biological ideology”.⁶ Still, according to him, the motivations or causes for turning genocide into a Holocaust in this particular case represent the motivation of the executioner—which is not inhumane or monstrous, but rather all too human. Therefore, the Final Solution denotes exactly what it tends to hide, transforming the Holocaust into an event sufficiently explainable through the very element of what is human which manifests itself in genocide in its extreme form. Coming back to what Levi has pointed out,

the victim’s withdrawal from the universal human activity—or human *speech*—cannot be understood by itself without the dehumanised executioner. Depriving the victim’s voice of speech, denying *the one who speaks* from leaving a word trace in the world about the crime committed, was the highest goal and the Nazi credo. Or, as Marc Nichanian would point out: that “genocide is not a fact”.⁷

And while I write these modest lines, I vividly think of a woman in Jerusalem who was once a *Muselmänner* in Auschwitz. She managed to survive thanks to two things. First, one of the prisoners pushed her into the pipes, through which she managed to escape and survive. And secondly, the prisoner was able to push her into the pipes simply because she was so thin, a silhouette, probably the same as is the *Muselmänner* from Mięcisław Koscielnik's drawing. The woman in Jerusalem who was once a *Muselmänner* in Auschwitz, never said anything about her experience as a Muslim in Auschwitz. Never. Her personal experience has never been recorded. May these lines here serve as modest contribution, an unwritten epitaph, for her, and all those whose experience of *Muselmänner* remains ineffable, along with their industrial death, produced by “humans” *for* humans.

Professor Sofija Grandakovska teaches comparative literature and anthropology of genocide. She is a poet and the author of three books of poetry: *Seal, The Burning Sun, and The Eighth Day* - sgrandakovska@jjay.cuny.edu.

⁵ Yehuda Bauer, “What was the Holocaust?”, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Yale University Press, 2001), 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-13.

⁷ Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, translated by with an afterword by Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1.

My Visit to Auschwitz

By Olivia Szafko



Throughout middle and high school, every conversation about the Holocaust and Auschwitz included photos. Different classes highlighted stories from the concentration camp, evaluations of the horrific things that occurred there, and photos of the victims. Although dark and solemn, class materials do not compare to seeing Auschwitz in person. I visited Auschwitz when I was around 14 years old. Half of my family is Polish and live in Krakow, a small town in Poland. Krakow is only an hour from Auschwitz and my family decided to take a day trip. Although it has been years, I can clearly remember how the energy changed upon arrival. There was such silence despite a flow of people arriving. One of the first things I noticed when entering was the massive, barbed wire gate surrounding the site, featured in a lot of photos. We had booked a tour of the site. We approached the welcome desk. The staff there was very quiet, and everyone whispered to one another.

Although it has been about 80 years since this camp was in use, the sense of sadness and solemnity remain the same. We understood the

atrocities committed there back in middle and high school but seeing the site in person forever changed my perspective. As a society, we have become desensitized to harsh and dark topics, but when we see places firsthand, we can no longer remain so, and everything becomes much more real. Seeing the places recounted in first person accounts we read about showed me how real the sites are in which such horrific scenes took place. This is life changing.

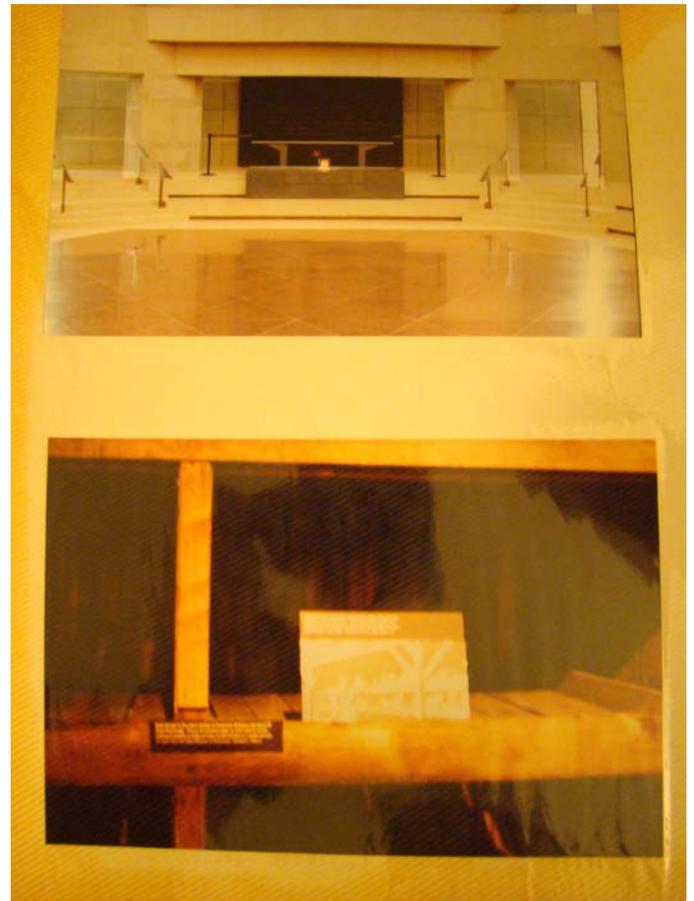
As a society, we have become desensitized to harsh and dark topics ...

Since visiting Auschwitz, I am no longer desensitized. I understand how horrible the Holocaust was from a completely different perspective. Eighty years after such horrific acts took place there, showed me how regardless of time passing, this location remains the same. The chambers, pathways and rooms are untouched, and those first-hand accounts are directly before us all. Although allowed, I did not take photos during my trip out of respect for the lives lost there.

Poland has many Holocaust memorials, many of which are in the capital, Warsaw. I have visited a lot of them, seeing some just this past summer when I traveled to Poland. All of these sights are solemn but none as truly moving as Auschwitz. Seeing this also made me realize how awful a government and dictatorship can be, and how religion, race and ethnicity can come to entirely define one's worth. Furthermore, it has become clear over the past years that this mindset has not changed, and it is easy to fall back to it. Still today, China has concentration camps for Uyghurs, or people with Turkish descent native to Northwest China. Although there is limited information, it is confirmed that camps exist for forced labor.

When remembering Auschwitz and the Holocaust, it is sad to see that almost 100 years later, some governments continue to maintain inhumane and horrific conditions.

Olivia Szafko is a BA student majoring in Forensic Psychology and is enrolled in



Never Again. Above: The Eternal Flame. Below: Prisoner barracks from Auschwitz, both featured in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. From a 1993 photo album, the year the museum opened.

Prof. Sofija Grandakovska's class ANT 230-05 Culture and Crime.

Dear Columbus,

The following letters were written by students under Professor Sofija Grandakovska's mentorship, for her ANT 230 Culture and Crime courses, fall 2022, following an assigned reading from Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States (1980). The critiques spurred by this work further inform what it means to be human.

Dear Columbus,

What do you think makes us human?

To me what makes us human is our capacity to commit both good and evil. For centuries people have questioned whether human nature is inherently good or bad. I believe that the answer is neither and that humans are somewhere in the middle, capable of both. Humans are capable of very good deeds and of very bad deeds such as in your case, Christopher Columbus. You, who have committed some of the most heinous acts in human history in the name of wealth and fame; you used the word and belief in a higher power to treat people as if they were subhuman.



Columbus in the City. Despite calls for its removal in 2017, this statue remains at Columbus Circle.

Humans are capable of very good deeds and of very bad deeds ...

The Arawaks treated you with nothing but kindness and all you gave them in return was death. You saw their tradition of hospitality and sharing and thought that they were people to subjugate. This is because where you come from, governed by kings, were all in a constant frenzy over money, so life otherwise confused you. Which is why the first thing you asked upon discovering a land of new people was where the gold was. Your time in this world led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands to millions.

Did you ever stop to think about your actions and how it would feel to be on the receiving end of such treatment? You killed and butchered your way through several islands leaving very little human life behind in the process. All the while claiming to be a man of

God who acted on behalf of a higher power. When in truth the promise of keeping 10% of the profit and receiving the governorship is what drove you to the point that you were willing to kill to meet your goals, even if this meant killing people with their own histories and cultures, people who unlike you had a sense of community that brought them together.

In your life you showed us the worst of human nature.

Sincerely,

Soumaila Maiga



Soumaila Maiga is a BS student majoring in Criminal Justice HOS at John Jay College enrolled in Prof. Sofija Grandakovska's class ANT 230-05 Culture and Crime, Fall 2022.

Dear Columbus,

What do you think makes us human?

I would like to begin my letter as I describe my opinion about this question. I think human beings are a compound of physical, mental, emotional, social elements and consciousness. When I say compound, this means that in order for a certain being to be called *human*, that person should have all of these five things. However, not all human beings have them completely. Just like people with difficulties,

some have lost body parts, others are born with missing parts. Those without the usual human figure should not be considered not-human. People with mental or emotional disorders lacking ordinary mental capacities and consciousness are still humans. People with anti-social disorders are also considered human.

As you can see from this first paragraph of my letter, I don't have the perfect identification and do not fully understand what humans are. Even as I write this, I, myself, cannot define humans and distinguish ourselves from animals and plants. I understand that humans should have the five things I listed, but there are some humans who do not have them completely. If I were to consider that humans must have all five things, then I am discriminating against some. Interestingly, animals and plants also have mental and emotional lives, they form a part of society, and can think as well. So, what makes humans *human*, and how does this differentiate us from the rest of the world?

I have read your previous letter about the things that you have discovered, and I am very proud. But I have also read about what you have done to the Arawaks, and I am disappointed. I have seen the picture and have read about their way of life, and they have at least the main five things. How can you not consider them as human as you are? Scientists and historians think *Australopithecus*, ape-like beings, the ancestors of human beings because of their bone structures and their way of living. They consider *Australopithecus* human for their physical figure, so how come you could not think about that in the case of the people you met? All living things have free will and fundamental rights to be respected.

... I know that every living thing has a right to live.

Sincerely,

Halin Kang



Halin Kang is a BA student majoring in International Criminal Justice at John Jay College enrolled in Prof. Sofija Grandakovska's class ANT 230-05 Culture and Crime, Fall 2022.

I cannot identify what is human and not, but I know all living things, human and non-human, should be respected according to their free will and their fundamental rights. The point I want to emphasize about your act of killing is not about whether those you killed are human, but I emphasize that who you killed, enslaved, tortured, and sold were living creatures who can think, feel, and have empathy. I do not know the answer to what make us humans, but I know that every living thing has a right to live. They deserve the same freedom as you.

That is all I wanted to say to you. Goodbye.

Below is a collection of excerpts written by other students also contributing powerful statements in their letters.

Dear Columbus,

What do you think makes us human? Stealing? Mutilation? Killing? Manipulation? I can go on. All these things and more you have done to the Arawak. I just want to ask you, what made you think you had the God-given right to terrorize them? What in your right mind made you think without a second thought that it was okay to not only strip an entire population from their culture and beliefs, but to rob



them of their land, steal their valuable items, and worst of all, enslave, auction, murder, assault, and make them work hard labor? If you came for one thing and one thing only, what possessed you to do such atrocious things? What made you think you were above them? Because they were not like you and your people? Because you thought your religion and your God made you superior and justified your actions? Or maybe

you and your men were intimidated by them?

Adamaris Velez

I have a question for you: were you able to sleep in peace ever since that expedition? Did you not feel any type of remorse? If you slept fine, then I would assume that you're not human. You preached about God in your letters and justified your actions with his words. Quite ironic for you to preach God's work if everything you did opposed his teachings. You sinned, which is okay because it's inevitable and we all sin, but you disregarded them and painted yourself a saint. You didn't follow the 10 commandments, you committed murder, you probably committed adultery, and let's not forget you stole. You stole these innocent peoples' land, you stole their possessions, you stole their lives, you took everything. Does it feel right?

Eldina Heredia

Many things are needed to make a human besides the human body itself. You need things like social skills to adapt and be able to function in a community. To gain social skills you will need a personality which allows you to find community or a group to fit into. Your personality comes from how you are raised and

the things you are exposed to while growing up. Besides your personality you need an education to learn how to live in a society run by a government. When you tie your education and your personality together, you figure out how to approach situations in your community which can help determine what type of person you are to society, whether you are looked at as a good or bad person.

George Brown

Let me ask you a new question: What makes us *inhumane*? I believe what makes us inhumane is our lack of empathy.

What makes us inhumane is constantly bullying and pushing over the little guy so that we can benefit from their suffering.

What makes us inhumane is our inability to show mercy to someone begging you to spare them the pain you are causing them.

So, Mr. Columbus, do you meet that criterion? Was it honestly worth the thousands of lives lost as a result of your "exploration" just for some title? May I remind you that you are merely a man, not immortal.

Sincerely,

Isha Khan

Adamaris Velez (Criminal Justice BS), Eldina Heredia (Criminology BA), George Brown (Criminal Justice BA), and Isha Khan (Criminology BA) are enrolled in two sections of Prof. Sofija Grandakovska's ANT 230 Culture and Crime course, Fall 2022.

***The Epic of Gilgamesh* and What it Means to Be Human**

By Jocelyn “Penny” Rios

The Epics of Gilgamesh confronts what it truly means to be a human in relation to society and nature by exploring the thing that separates humans from our more primitive animal counterparts: our ability to make and express deep connections. This is shown through the stark comparison between the two central characters, Gilgamesh and Enkidu. As Gilgamesh grew in power, he became a tyrant, losing and rejecting his humanity to live like the two-thirds god he was. The tyrant king raped and harassed his people, until one day the goddess of the land decided to make Gilgamesh a rival as well as a companion. Enkidu was created as the opposite of Gilgamesh, but they did have striking similarities. One was wild and lived amongst the beasts, while the other was a ruthless king who tried to live as a god; both men needed to be taught the truth of humanity, that *Homo sapiens* belong to cultures and societies.

What does it mean to be human? We are complex creatures, paradoxical beings. It feels as though we as humans are in a constant fight with nature and the desire to attain godhood, so much that we settle in between both worlds. More than animals, due to our defiance and destructive natures. However, we are less than gods due to

our short lifespans and knowledge limitations. *The Epics of Gilgamesh* proposes a peculiar answer to this age-long question, and it is interesting to think that the oldest of texts, the most ancient of us, would have the most suitable answers. A powerful motif in the epics is the idea that to be human, people must first experience genuine intimacy between themselves and another person. If this is something people have not experienced in their lives, they are human in name only. Enkidu acts like an animal at the beginning of the story because he has not experienced genuine intimacy with another person. After making love to a woman, he gains the willingness to become “human”. Gilgamesh tries to be a god and rejects his humanity until he meets Enkidu and learns through their friendship what genuine human connection means.

... [T]o be human, people must first experience genuine intimacy between themselves and others.

Gilgamesh, though born into society, was not yet comfortable with his fate as a human being. So, he tried to live as a god-king, who abused his power and his people. Thinking humanity was weak, Gilgamesh shunned it in favor of cardinal sins like lust and gluttony. Sins only gods can indulge in without being

penalized. When the men and women of his kingdom could no longer tolerate the rape and unfair treatment, the gods stepped in to make Gilgamesh a rival. And throughout the years, Gilgamesh and Enkidu had many adventures and conquests, from wrestling through the city to slaying beasts and demons. With new motivations and goals, Gilgamesh left behind tormenting his people and focused on faithfully living life. Until Enkidu was killed by the gods, only then did Gilgamesh know the true misery and despair that comes with humanity. For the first time, Gilgamesh felt mortal, and without even realizing it, Enkidu had made him human. Throughout their journeys, Gilgamesh experienced what it was like to genuinely love someone, and to have that type of bond stripped away, while experiencing the fear of death, meant Gilgamesh was more mortal than God after all (regardless of what type of blood ran through veins). It was brotherly love that humbled and tamed the ruthless king of Uruk. It was that same love that led to some of his best moments in life. And it was the absence of that love and grief that overwhelmed Gilgamesh, leading him to try and fail to find immortality. Soon he discovered the true meaning of life and learned to appreciate the good and bad aspects of being human. With that, he lived contently.

Enkidu was created by a goddess to be the opposite of Gilgamesh. At first, he is more beast than man, having been raised by animals who accepted him as one of their own. This was a man

ostracized by society. As the text says he belonged to no one and no land. He was a hint of a person. Like most animals, he survived in the wild, but humans have a unique aspect in which we live life knowing that we are not alive for long. It was only when he had made love to a woman that he understood what it meant to be a man. The delicate sexual experience was so innately human that when Enkidu left to be one with nature again, the animals rejected him. They had sensed his humanity and feared it. Having nowhere to go, his newfound lover invited him to her city, where he met his companion, Gilgamesh. The experience of sex for pleasure and not for reproduction is considered an exclusively human experience. To put passion into sex, to care and respect the other person, is human connection. Unlike what Enkidu and Gilgamesh had, this bond was not love, but respect, consent, and enjoyment. It opened up Enkidu to human nature and its wonders.

Beings of such complexity are not meant to be in nature, as nature is pure (devoid of both good and evil), and humans are wicked. Instead, we function better in a society of peers, a tribe of our own. Humans need society to function and fulfill purposes. The laws of society and morality that stem from culture keeps intrusive thoughts at bay. This is why both Enkidu and Gilgamesh couldn't function in the beginning of the story, why they were stuck as something that wasn't what they were meant to be. Instead, they needed to come to terms with what it meant to

be human, because as humans we are social by nature. Like newborns who might die without knowing the warmth of their mothers, we will lose our way and die without socialization. Birthed by society, culture is the expectations we have for people. Gilgamesh violated his people's basic human rights, as well as the most fundamental rule of society and culture: living in harmony with others. For this and many other sins, Gilgamesh was punished. In short, humans are a danger to nature and nature knows it. So, we reject nature, we cut her down. Instead, we create our own ecosystem, one of buildings and other humans, trying to live and form attachments.

Gilgamesh learned to accept himself, Enkidu learned to live as a man. By accepting society, both men had a better quality of life. Through exclusively human experiences of friendship, making love, and the fear of death, our main characters grow and become better than they once were. In the end, Gilgamesh lived happily among his people with the memories of a friend by his side. Enkidu gained a companion who would never leave him and came to know what a familial bond was. All this would not be possible without first experiencing passion. Those who reject humanity want to become gods. Neither life is feasible for a human being. Instead, we rest in the mortar between the bricks, not omnipotent or all powerful as a god, and not as simple and basic as an ordinary animal. Fearing death, falling into despair, and

grieving is part of the human experience as well. By the same token, accepting ourselves, being social entities, and learning to live our lives to the best of our ability is also part of what it means to be human in a given society and culture.



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Ancient theatre emerged from myth and storytelling. Epic stories and myths continue to teach important lessons about our humanity. That process and its representation is immortalized all around us.

What Makes Us Human in Relation to Nature and Culture?

By Wes Widjonarko

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the story explores two main characters and their relationship with nature and culture. Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, is two-thirds god and one-third human, and his match, Enkidu, is a man born in nature without any knowledge of human culture as he spends his days with the animals. Is someone really human even without a relationship with culture, and how do nature and culture differentiate human traits?

Gilgamesh is known for reigning terror in his city; as king and being born God and human, he abuses his title and uses his brute strength to show off. His people do not love him as he rapes women while forcing the men to stand down. Enkidu, on the other hand, was created when the gods accepted the cries of the people of Uruk; the gods wanted someone equal to Gilgamesh to change his behavior and to teach him a valuable lesson. Enkidu was a man born in the forest, with only animals as his family and no human interaction. However, Gilgamesh sends a prostitute named Shamhat to attract Enkidu and bring him into the city of Uruk, where he meets Gilgamesh. Enkidu's interaction with Shamhat changes him as a person because before that, Enkidu was simply a beast who happened to be

human, and the animals accepted him as their own. After that, the animals cast Enkidu out as they knew he was no longer part of them. Enkidu evolves because his relationship with Shamhat opens him up to the human aspect of culture he had never experienced.

Without culture, humans would be alone and unable to create meaningful relationships ...

Humans are social creatures, and a sense of culture is necessary to stay human. Without culture, humans would be alone and unable to create meaningful relationships, whether as friends or romantically. On the other hand, Gilgamesh grew up in a culture, but his actions are very toxic to his people and their culture. When Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet, they fight each other because of their differences in ideology, but in the end, they find that a brotherhood had been formed. I think nature plays a part in this because it is in human nature to create strong bonds amongst humans. However, communication is required to achieve it. In the end, I think that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* offers us help for understanding what makes us human in relation to nature and culture. Our relationship with nature and culture is vital because it makes us human; we use nature to survive and use culture to evolve. Culture and nature play a huge role in globalization, without them, people would not have been able to travel and communicate with each other or to create

the environment we live in today. Without globalization, there would not be a modern world. The way humans utilize nature and culture in the modern world shows how much we have progressed as a community from ancient times. Writings like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* help us understand how the world worked in the past and how certain aspects of the stories can benefit us now.



Wes Widjonarko is a BS student in Security Management with a Cybercrime Minor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and is enrolled in Prof. Sofija Grandakovska's class PSY 210-14 Sex and Culture, Fall 2022.

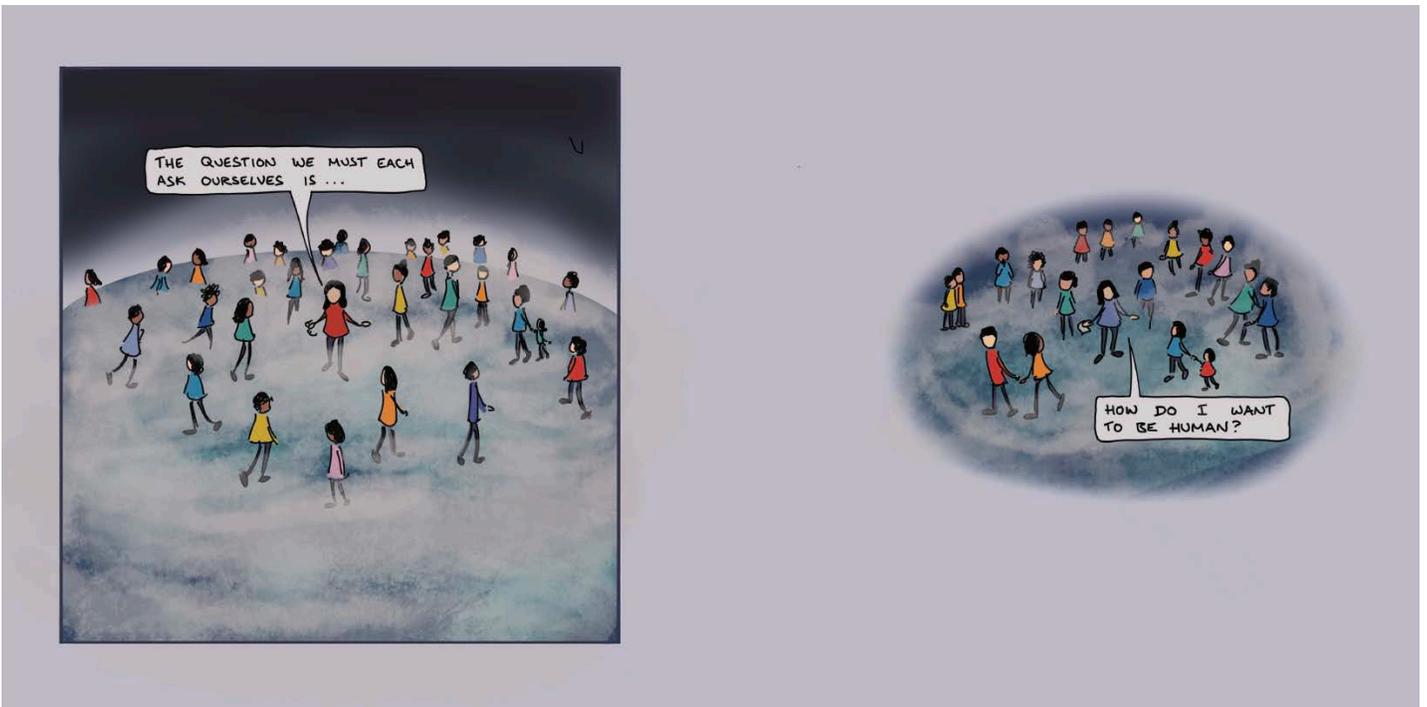


Illustration from the graphic novel, *Light in Dark Times: The Human Search for Meaning*, by Alisse Waterston with illustrations by ©Charlotte Corden.

From the Chair's Desk



It's great to be mostly back on campus in person this Fall term and I hope everyone is enjoying their classes! The Anthropology Department has some great things in the works for the near future. We have new anthropology courses being developed about the experience of Asian Americans developed by Professor Anru Lee, and on Cultural Polarization and Social Media under development by Professor Rob Hollander. Be on the lookout for these courses in Fall 2023! Professor Barbara Cassidy is offering Anthropology and Theater again for Spring 2023 so make sure you spread the word about this great Special Topics course. The new undergraduate Anthropology Club is now up and running and we are looking forward to supporting it in any way we can. Professor Avi Bornstein (abornstein@jjay.cuny.edu) is looking for student involvement in a wonderful research opportunity to attend and observe NYPD public community engagement meetings throughout the city. Send him a note if you are interested in this excellent opportunity to involve undergraduates in real research that matters. Finally, this April during Spring term 2023 will be the **ten-year anniversary** of *Seeing Rape* – performances of student work by actors in John Jay's Gerald Lynch Theater, a program coordinated by Professors Barbara Cassidy and Shonna Trinch.

Please mark your calendars for **April 19, 20 and 21** as *Seeing Rape* is one of the most well-attended student-focused events on our campus and Anthropology has played a big part in its success. We would like to continue supporting it and one way to do this is by incorporating the performances and the subject matter in creative and substantive ways into all our Spring term ANT courses. One might see this as a sort of Common Reading often assigned on small liberal arts campuses. This means more than just including *Seeing Rape* as an extra credit assignment but incorporating the experience in some way into your own syllabus. This kind of cross-curricular engagement is an important way to support our students

and to have them inspire other students. If you would like help in how to easily integrate *Seeing Rape* into your courses next term, let me know. I would be happy to assist!

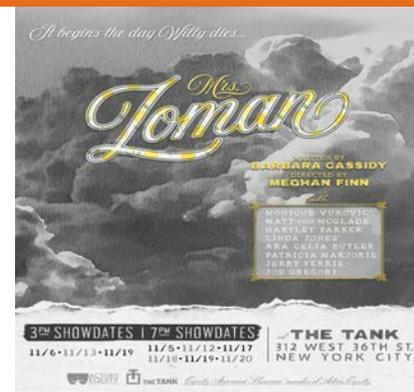
Last, but not least, we want to wish Professor Clate Korsant the best of luck as he begins his new position as Assistant Director of Academic Affairs at the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. Congratulations, Clate!

Ed Snajdr

Fall 2022

Ed Snajdr is Professor and Chair in the Department of Anthropology - snajdr@jjay.cuny.edu.

DEPARTMENT NEWS: Attend and support feminist theater!



MRS LOMAN is an imagining of what could happen to Linda Loman, from Miller's **Death of a Salesman**, after Willy commits suicide. It is a critique of misogyny in Miller's world. Running for nine performances Nov 5-20th. Written by Barbara Cassidy, directed by Meghan Finn, with Monique Vukovic in title role. Tickets can be purchased here: <https://ci.ovationtix.com/35658/production/1139995?performanceId=11168390>



Robots are ever-present in children's stories, engaging their imagination.

Contact Us

News from the Ninth Floor

Fall 22, Vol. 5 No. 2

Anthropology Department, Ninth Floor

New Building

524 West 59th Street

New York, NY, 10019

212.237.8000

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stay tuned for upcoming **Live from the Ninth Floor Symposium** events!

Do you like learning about new cultures and diverse human societies? Join the Anthropology Department's anthropology club! This is a student-led and student-run project. To get involved, contact the two Anthropology Majors heading the club, Marco Alba and Natasha Santana at marco.alba@jjay.cuny.edu and natasha.santana1@jjay.cuny.edu and participate!

The Faculty Advisors for the club are Veroni Antoniadis, Anru Lee, and Department Chair, Ed Snajdr.

NEWS FROM THE NINTH FLOOR

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News from the Ninth Floor
the anthropology@johnjay newsletter

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