

The Nass is a rebel without a cause. A tortured creature. A little dog with a big bite. This week, we're counterculture.

The Nassau Weekly



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CULTURE WAR

Masthead

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- 4

We Belong to No One But Ourselves
By Layla Chaaraoui, Rania Jones, Jonah Karafiol, and Sara Kumar
- 6

Treatise on Believing in Yourself from Elizabeth Holmes
By Juna Brothers
Art by James Swineheart
- 7

Nass Recommends: Guy Trebay's *Do Something*
By Gavin Stroud
- 8

Modern Love
By Aiko Offner
Art by Ollie Braden
- 10

the ills of talent: A Manifesto
By Lucy McWeeny
- 11

Call of Duty: VR Training with the Princeton Police
By Frankie Solinsky Duryea
Photos by Frankie Solinsky Duryea
- 14

The bar where the beach boys used to play
By Sasha Rotko
Art by Aidan Cusack
- 16

Counter Cultures
By Wendy Wang
- 17

On Umwelt: Experience as a Shapeable Thing
By Mia Mann-Shafir
Art by Caroline Madsen
- 20

Crossword: Locavore's Locale
By Simon Marotte

Dear Readers,

Dominant institutions of power have co-opted “culture,” fragmenting it in the process; universities are censored, while mainstream publications ignore the needs and concerns of younger generations, increasingly reflecting outdated sentiments.

We’re aware that meditating on “culture,” rather than subsistence, is a sign of privilege. But the line between culture and politics is thin, and conforming to dominant culture is resultantly an agreement to support the status quo. We always publish with the intent of nonconformity, but this week we focus on just that idea: this is the *Nass*’s first Counterculture Issue.

In these pages, our writers present alternative modes of thinking. We write dispatches from a university that upholds historical power dynamics and elitism—we don’t pretend to believe that our magazine offsets this effect, but it does exist as an assertion of resistance. This issue is our attempt to reflect more explicitly on the idea of “counterculture” and its manifestations.

As culture evolves, counterculture necessarily must too. So understand these articles and opinions as snapshots—these ideas will become outdated, soon to serve as archives of the alternative. The *Nass* will continue to represent opposition to cultural hegemony. Don’t ever let us get too comfortable.

Peace on earth,
Frankie Solinsky Duryea and Alex Norbrook, EICs

This Week:

By Amy Başkurt

Hello, Princeton!! I feel that spring is officially here. Y'all know what that means: start looking forward to a campus adorned with flowers, studying outside, picnics with friends, and a whole new set of swingin' campus charades. Let's look at some of them!

Shows

Ah, yes, we are entering that beautiful time of year—one replete with senior, dance, and theater shows! Starting off, make your way over to the **2025 VIS Junior Show**, where VIS minor juniors are showcasing their lovely work. **Closing April 16th, Lucas Gallery, 185 Nassau St. is open weekdays from 8am - 8:30pm and weekends 9am - 8:30pm.**

Theatre Intime is presenting **Missing Dog, Very Helpful**, written by the lovely Kristen Tan '26. Shows are **Friday, April 11th and Saturday, April 12th at 8pm, along with Sunday, April 13th at 2pm**, as always, in **Hamilton Murray Theater!**

Films and Festivals

Looking forward to the **Princeton Jazz Festival**? It's always a highlight of my spring semester. **April 12th, in Richardson's Alexander Hall, join from 1-4:30pm** for the festival portion and attend the faculty performance, featuring famed guitarist Miles Okazaki, at 4:45pm!

Princeton's **3rd annual French Film Festival** is taking place from now until **Friday April 25th**. Featuring 20 films (with

English subtitles), Q&As, and a "ciné-symposium" with an Honorary Oscar Awardee, this is not to be missed!

Come celebrate student acting in a **queer exploration of William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream** in the LCA's Drapkin Studio. This free ticketed performance is the culmination of the spring course "Topics in Ensemble Performing" and is directed by faculty member Chesney Snow. Shows are **Friday and Saturday, April 11th and 12th at 7:30pm, Sunday, April 13th at 2 and 7pm**. With four different shows, you cannot miss it!

Guest Lecture

Make sure to attend the Department of Art & Archaeology guest lecture, **The World In Between: Egypt and Nubia in Africa:**

Telling the story through museum artifacts. Join Professor Anastasia Dakouri-Hild of the University of Virginia in a conversation about the relationship between Egypt and Nubia, in **East Pyne 010, Monday, April 14th, 4:30pm - 6pm.**

As we enter into these last weeks of the semester, I strongly encourage everyone to attend as many campus events as possible. I know you will be in awe of what students have to offer. See y'all next week.

Email Amy Başkurt at ab7955@princeton.edu with your event!

For advertisements, contact Ellie Diamond at ed7627@princeton.edu

Verbatims:

Overheard at Terrace
Diagrammatic diva: "We made a deal that when fascism takes hold, we're going to start vaping again."

Overheard at Shere Khan Darch
Someone who hates acapella renditions of Imagine: "Gal Gadot is a girl chud."

Overheard on C-Floor of Firestone
Attention Historian: "I've just learned that there's a class-action lawsuit against Film at Lincoln Center" (spills full bottle of Diet Coke all over table).

Overheard in Coffee Club
Nass Head Design: "I'm kind of the English GOAT if you think about it."

Overheard in Firestone
Girl: "Multigasm, is that a word?"
Boy: "It is now. Ohhhhh, baby."

Overheard outside Teresa's
Nassling: "I wish guys had urologists like girls had gynecologists. I want a more specific doctor to look at my junk."

Overheard inside the U-Store
Freshman who needs to stop saying shit like this: "I feel like I'm the golden retriever of this friendship."

Overheard on the Dinky
Passenger: "You know, you just can't avoid meeting architects at Princeton...and there aren't any good ones."

Overheard in Frist
Student after a night at Terrace: "It was annoying talking to him, so I hooked up with him instead."

Overheard on Cannon Green
Student talking to another student of the class of 2024: "It looks like your hair has depopulated on your head since the last time I saw you."

Overheard at Late Meal
Sleep-deprived senior with misplaced priorities: "I haven't started my thesis yet, but I've ranked every bathroom on campus by pee-ability."

Overheard in SLA class
Anxious professor: "This is good to know if you ever have a demonic encounter."

Submit to Verbatims
Email thenassauweekly@gmail.com

The *Nassau Weekly* is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. *There is no formal membership of the Nassau Weekly and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to thenassauweekly@gmail.com by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!*

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Join us: We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

About us:

We Belong to No One But Ourselves

Members of the Harvard Independent's Editorial Board reflect on counterculture.

By LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26, RANIA JONES '27, JONAH KARAFIOL '26, SARA KUMAR '27

In an America where national unity seems a relic of a by-gone era, the landscape of political and social life is marked by stark divisions. Democrats and Republicans are further apart ideologically than at any other time in the last fifty years. Trust has dwindled not only for elected officials but even the Supreme Court. The majority of Americans find cross-aisle debate stressful, and “divisive” is the word we most associate with politics. The immediate result is the formation of echo chambers where dissenting voices fall on deaf ears. The internet is even worse, where algorithms sort readers into ideological solos without their even knowing it.

What does this polarization mean for the counterculture? What does it mean to oppose the mainstream when the mainstream is at odds with itself, leaving no room for a middle ground? In this context, the counterculture is compelled to reimagine what it means to stand in opposition. Without a coherent whole, the traditional role of dissent—challenging a unified power—loses some

of its clarity. Instead, opposing the mainstream now requires questioning the very binary framework that dictates how we understand political and social life.

Within this framework, without a clear center, every stance must align with one extreme or the other. This leaves little room for nuance, forcing those on the margins to deconstruct the language of division itself—a language that, to borrow from Foucault, was established by and for the preservation of power. The counterculture must reject the discourse that reduces complex realities to a series of zeros and ones, thus ignoring the subtlety and diversity of human experience. In the issues that plague society today, there seems to be less and less tolerance for anything but extremism; “it’s complicated” is no longer acceptable.

In such an environment of fragmentation and binary thinking, the role of journalism transforms from simply documenting events to actively challenging the very frameworks that shape our understanding. As the counterculture dismantles the language of division, the responsibility of college publications becomes both an act of inquiry and a quest

for truth—they must navigate a terrain where every inhabitant is forced to pick a side.

This task demands an approach that is both reflective and bold—a commitment to uncovering the untold stories hidden within campus corridors and beyond. Here, journalism transcends the mere transmission of information. It becomes a form of resistance, a method of probing the unsettling questions that arise from a fractured public sphere, and a means to restore a measure of balance in a world overwhelmed by polarizing extremes, with steadfast, renewed determination.

Jonah Karafiol '26

The *Harvard Independent* was founded in 1969 by students and alumni who felt the campus needed an alternative to the *Harvard Crimson*. At the time, the founders of the *Independent* felt politically alienated from other Harvard publications. In the decades since the Vietnam War, the *Indy* has been released every Thursday, becoming an alternative weekly rather than a standard newspaper.

The *Harvard Independent* exists on this campus as a rejection of the idea that the news should belong to those who already have power. We are neither a mouthpiece nor a megaphone. We are not constrained by donors or dictated by a party line. We were founded in 1969 as an act of defiance, and we remain so—not because we are contrarian for the sake of it, but because we know that the truth, the kind worth writing, is rarely found where people are too comfortable to look.

At the *Indy*, we believe in transparency, in curiosity, in the pursuit of the story that isn’t being told. We know that the best writing, the kind that lingers, does not come from a place of detachment but from being in the room, listening closely, asking the taboo questions that make people uncomfortable. We question and critique viewpoints, perspectives, and beliefs. We take an understanding and flip it on its head.

We take our time to investigate, to think, to craft something that will hold up beyond the momentary flash of a headline. We believe that journalism should be an act of storytelling. We are chasing

the angles that others miss, the undercurrents of campus life, the strange, the subversive, the stories that reveal.

We pitch pieces, we offer our perspective, and in doing so, we shape the discourse. That is why we exist, why we continue—there is always something left to say, and someone has to say it.

Rania Jones '27



“I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see, and what it means.” As Joan Didion echoes in her bestselling memoir, *Let Me Tell You What I Mean*, I’ve discovered that spoken dialogue falls short to words committed on the page. Clipped sentences; twisted metaphors; broken stanzas—all convey more than my voice could ever hope to. Catharsis became inherent to my pen as late nights of staring at my ceiling reckoning with feelings of suffering, laughter, exasperation, or exaltation shifted to evenings with my Dad’s Waterman and a Moleskin on the floor of my bedroom, stringing letters together in messy cursive until my cacophony of thoughts hushed to a mere hum.

However, I never saw myself

as much of a journalist even as I turned to storytelling as a key form of free expression to quell my emotions bubbling so raw at the surface. Instead, I was a creative writer who pursued fictitious stories of life and loss that paralleled the lines of my own existence—times of strength embodied through characters persevering, times of suffering painted through protagonists enduring. To be frank, I often saw tabloids as invasive as TMZ or the magazines lined by grocery store tills plastered facetious headlines that denigrate their subjects but nonetheless appeal to their prying readers. However, 12 Arrow Street slowly turned my previous perception of newspapers on its head.

During my almost-four semesters as a member of the *Independent*, I’ve learned that our publication is distinct in every aspect. Born during a time of protest and polarization, the unique place of power and reflection that I found within the depths of my journals was also intrinsic to the *Indy*. We not only speak on presidential elections, geopolitical conflicts, or on-campus protests—issues that conventionally matter to the populace as covered by the *New York Times* or even the Harvard Crimson. However, we also offer what other newspapers cannot: the hearts of our writers as we embrace counterculture journalism to unearth often-buried topics. Suicide, substances, sex—nothing is taboo in our space. And from this authorial liberation and lack of censorship, each weekly issue is emblematic of the distinct stories and passions of our staff that hopefully resonates with others who likewise believe in what we discuss.

I encourage anyone reading this to turn to our paper as either a viewer or a member. Because

this belonging and devotion I and many others have found at the *Indy* is not limited to those who frequent 12 Arrow St. As our mission suggests, everyone is welcome in our space: “If we belong to no one, how can we tell anyone that they don’t belong with us?”

Sara Kumar '27

With the intersection of the *Independent* and counterculture journalism, the mission of our publication is reinforced: we are a space that drives revolution in our ever-evolving coverage and voices critical perspectives through our writers.

I feel the importance of the *Independent* most when I witness a writer step out of their comfort zone, crafting a piece that takes bold risks and pushes beyond the limits they never realized they had imposed on themselves. I see the power of the *Independent* when a story about the hard work of a cultural organization, student production, faculty initiative, or administrative update is shared on our website and reaches the hands of students every Thursday morning. I hear the significance of the *Independent* through passing conversations sparked by our stories proliferating across campus. The relentless dedication our staff pours into creating, writing, editing, and publishing pieces inform our student body and beyond. It is through this unwavering commitment to accuracy and transparency that we create a deeper connection with our readers, who rely on us to bring clarity and perspective to the issues that matter most.

Our readers discuss the work in the *Independent* because it is interesting, but they stick around because it is true.

Freedom of the press is the foundation of a sustaining society—one that is informed, diverse, and whole. The *Independent* is committed to safeguarding knowledge and information, because nothing is more powerful than the ability to be informed. The Wellness Issue. The Controversy Issue. The Counterculture Issue—by challenging taboos and defying the status quo, the *Independent* maintains its position at Harvard as a true advocate for all people. At the *Independent*, we embrace our role as the counterculture because it is the very foundation upon which we were built. The activism at our core is what defines us and empowers us to instill the core journalistic principles that shape and guide our staff. We honor the integrity of our past, deliver the truths of today, and provide insights that shape the future through our commitment to storytelling. We stand firm in these values—fearlessly embracing the counterculture of our world—and will carry them forward, from our generation to the next.

Layla Chaaraoui '26

The Harvard Independent belongs to no one but the Nassau Weekly.

Treatise on Believing in Yourself from Elizabeth Holmes

By JUNA BROTHERS

To diagnose someone means they're already sick. We need more time, I tell my investors—Kissinger and the other men. It can only happen in blood. I don't give stories or specificities. Silicon Valley means you create the outline and let them fill you in. All I do is put on a low voice, Steve Jobs uniform—he died of pancreatic cancer, we're working on a test for that with just one drop—and a clipped laugh about fearing needles. To young girls, I say find what you love so much that when you get fired, you'll do it again—because this time you would build it differently. Just a little more time, I say, my eyes wide open, unblinking. It's almost here.



Nass Recommends:

Trebay's memoir of growing up in New York City presents a poignant picture of a time when artists could actually afford rent.

By GAVIN STROUD

A grand house lies reduced to ashes, and a young man sifts through the ruins looking for a caramel-colored suitcase and answers. Were Guy Trebay's 2024 autobiography *Do Something* a work of fiction, it would be easier to critique this opening as too on the nose, too tightly tailored to the surrounding narrative—one absolutely littered with ashes both literal and not. The subtitle on the book's jarring purple-and-yellow cover foreshadows the loom of destruction, a story about the "glitter and doom" that surrounded Trebay during his coming-of-age in 1970s New York.

Trebay was born into money at a time in New York when 'wealthy' meant something different than 'comfortable.' However, it was not privilege of the ivy-plastered stone house, East Egg variety—even if it looked that way from the street; Trebay had no trust fund, private school education, or hand-me-down Land Rover like his peers. Riding off the miraculous success of Hawaiian Surf, a fad fragrance à la Drakkar Noir the brainchild of Trebay's absent, dream-dizzy father, he says plainly that his family was merely "rich for a while." Chartered planes, imported sports cars, and trips to expensive equatorial resorts were all part of a "seemingly invincible glamour" which danced around his youth and defended his family's vision of a future where these things

would remain. But sooner rather than later, all these things faded away as he entered adolescence, setting out to forge an identity for himself.

What I find most remarkable about the book is its dexterity, balancing with remarkable deft a personal narrative housing an exploration of—as a New York Times review of the book put it—Trebay's "own fugitive needs," a scattered but comprehensive family history, and an efficient overview of the grimy yet brilliant pre-AIDS Warholian cultural moment. Readers are ushered through scenes featuring characters like writer Jamaica Kincaid, fashion designer Charles James, drag queen and Lou Reed muse Candy Darling ("everybody's darling" in "Walk on the Wild Side"), and many other Warhol superstars. His coverage as well of a vast cast of oddballs, crooks, performance artists, and everyone in between gives substance. It forms Trebay's New York into a textured rendering of a place worthy of membership in the class of Mishima's Kyoto or even Faulkner's Mississippi. He speaks of the place as though it were his own flesh and blood; considering his childhood, maybe I can say that the city itself raised him.

First New York fed him, offering up one odd job after another, affording him rent in a cheap Bronx apartment and the necessities of

life like hard liquor, psychedelics, and groceries. Then in time, it supplied him an identity, one among the characters that only could have existed in this place at this specific time. Interestingly, he never wanted to be a writer. In fact, a large part of the story is dedicated to his discovery of the craft. Throughout the book, writing comes to him like a disease, not by a conscious choice but rather the gradual accumulation of symptoms: among them a propensity to observe, the happenstance presence of flashy things and interesting people, a strong memory, and a lack of formal training in anything that pays.

But even before reading the first line, we know that reading the book is an act of waiting for a hammer to fall. This house, too, will burn. The AIDS epidemic effectively snuffed out the vibrant "microecology" of gig musicians and drag dancers and avant-garde writers and fashion designers which flourished in Trebay's time. But he shows us how it is all the more beautiful for its fleeting, for

we can savor and see in a way that no one could at the time, when it seemed like rents would be low and food cheap and music playing forever.

There are many reasons for an autobiography. Some writers do it for money, some to cleanse or admonish themselves, some to try and resuscitate a career, and many others. I don't claim to know exactly why Trebay wrote *Do Something*, nor would such an understanding be helpful for me as I try to sell this book to you. I doubt he had only one reason, but the clearest to me is that he hopes his words can preserve a time that cannot ever be again. His approach to storytelling is preservation, not merely of his own life, but of an entire era—a snowglobe, rather than a postcard, if you'll accept a reaching analogy. And I believe testimony matters from someone like him, someone who survived and is himself both artifact and museum.

Gavin Stroud does, in fact, do something in the Nassau Weekly.

**Coming of Age
Amid the Glitter
and Doom of
'70s New York**

GUY TREBAY



MODERN LOVE



“We went a year without sleeping with one another. The act of speaking was already intimate enough.”

By AIKO OFFNER

I met Jill around the time we were protesting language. We weren’t doing this in so many words, but animalistic grunts and shadows we’d create with our hands. I remember we weren’t supposed to call our new communication styles animalistic because that was exactly what the vegan enterprise was protesting.

But the reality was that this movement started entirely separate from the vegan enterprise movement. By the sixties, everybody was communicating with everyone about everything. We had been raised by parents who wanted to communicate every detail on every platform and then communicate about that communication. By the time we got to college we were exhausted by syllables. Words were coming out like scripts. We didn’t

know how to say what we were feeling anymore. We became scared of secondary sources, and I think there was a fear that maybe we had lost the ability to know what we were feeling, raw. When a Rutgers University student received a fortune cookie with a blank piece of paper it occurred to him, and then to campuses across the country, that it was our generation’s duty to reset language.

There were many factions of the movement: those who wore the mouthguards, those who wore no mouthguards but spoke little, those who restricted themselves to trisyllabic words, and those who didn’t participate at all. The impartial were indeed looked down upon as “sheep,” which was funny because one of the practices of the movement was to bleat when people spoke in trisyllabic or longer words. Ironically, the people protesting most ardently were the humanities students, whose departments were affected the most. Their seminars became infested with bleats of all kinds, and

professors eventually adapted to introducing themselves as “teach” at the start of semesters.

I was somewhere between the non-speakers and the trisyllabers, mainly for social reasons. I had come to college to study rocks, and I didn’t want to be ostracized further. But I was obsessed, specifically with the volcanoes on Hawaii, where my parents had taken me when I was ten. We never travelled because they are massive xenophobes, to the extent that they would not want to be a foreigner in another country because they would empathize too deeply with the other side. So everything about Hawaii was thrilling: the fact that we couldn’t bring fruit into it, that it had black sand and active volcanoes. The following winter, I begged my parents to take us to Hawaii again, but they had been so scarred by the intense “beach culture” that for the rest of my teens they refused. To this day, I don’t know if I want to be a seismologist out of rebellion or love for the sand. I suppose it is always a bit of

both.

Jill also had a traditional upbringing, more so than me. Her parents were xenophobes and flat-earthers, although I got the sense that they didn’t know to call themselves that. She never told me much about them, just that they were afraid of borders and tropical fruits, and that they feared the ocean because it would end. She told me how outraged they were when she asked to go to the beach once—had she not thought about the risk of falling off, did she think her life was such a trivial thing? I was desperate to know her, so I made conclusions: that the ocean to her was what Hawaii was to me, that she grew up with a lack of language that made her immune to the movement.

But before I knew any of this, she was the girl who would stay long after class studying transform plate boundaries while I pored over basaltic rock samples. As she leaned over the seismometer (which we called the quaking-station at the time), her shoulder-length hair

would cover her cheekbones a little bit and she looked so pretty—her nose so pointy, and her neck strained, so gentle. We were alone those afternoons, often even the lab instructors had left, but we did not talk. The movement had eliminated the notion of small talk, and I did not know where she stood—that is, whether a “hello” would offend her and ruin my chances. But one afternoon, when Jill started to leave early and I fought an instinct to stop her, I realized I had been staying late to study her face and not my rock samples.

So I ran after her. I tapped her on the shoulder and when she turned to face me, I noticed that her eyes were blue and I lost every word I had. My heart squeezed. When she tells this story, she will tell you that I started breathing really hard and moaned. The version I would like to tell is that I literally did not have any words, that I did not know if speaking to her would be offensive, so I gave what I thought was a pleading wail. Maybe a grunt, but certainly not a moan.

She laughed, and said, “Oh, you’re a part of this?”

“NO, no,” I said, relieved in so many ways. She laughed. “NO, I’m not—”

“Don’t switch sides for me,” she cackled.

“No, I didn’t want to offend you I don’t believe in this—”

“Then why do it at all?”

I fell in love with her right then and there. When she started walking I started walking. When she stopped, I stopped to ask her out.

“Why’d you stop?” she asked.

“Because you did,” I responded.

“Baaaaah,” she bleated. I asked her out nonetheless.

Our first date was at the burger restaurant a mile from campus. It was their last week before going out of business, concurrent vegan enterprise movement and all. As we cut across campus, we walked in silence, and I felt the feelings of “like” gurgling inside of me. I had forgotten how to say them, and the more I thought, the more I forgot all the words I knew. It was fall, and that saved me; a leaf fell in my hand, and I gave it to her. She mocked an expression of confusion, then held the leaf up, and with this adorable look of shock and tone of a kindergarten teacher, exclaimed, “leaf!” We cackled, and that was that.

We were shy with each other. As the movement intensified, we did our speaking in private. “We’re moving in counterclockwise,” Jill

said to me once, and she was right. In an absence of words, people had resorted to exchanging lewd glances to one another to sleep with them. People learned to sleep with people first, then speak. Intimacy had been inverted.

We went a year without sleeping with one another. The act of speaking was already intimate enough. But in our senior spring, the movement waned—professors started reintroducing -isms and -tions, and by the time we graduated, we had recalibrated to exactly where we were. Papers became hard again, classes less animalistic. And Jill and I had sex for the first time. Having lost the intimacy of speaking, we lost our own closeness and were trying to salvage things. It didn’t work, it was silent, and we lost our words altogether. We never recovered from this silence. When we did speak, it was more painful than nothing at all because I realized that our closeness was circumstantial. And I think she realized it too. What I wish I had realized, though, was that speaking with Jill throughout the language protest was the closest I would feel with anybody in my life.

Aiko Offner had come to the Nassau Weekly to study rocks.

the ills of talent: A Manifesto



The talent-less of the world,
unite!

By LUCY MCWEENY

INTRODUCTION

1. The notion of talent has been the most destructive force in the lives of innocent young people hoping to make it big. This destruction goes unnoticed because the conniving “Big Talent” — namely, pop culture — positions talent as something we should desire and be striving towards.

2. We define talent, with the help of our AI generator, as “a natural aptitude or a special ability that someone possesses, often requiring little or no training, and can be demonstrated in areas like music, art, sports, or communication.” We will confine talent’s definition to these areas, because no matter what my parents say, my ability to eat Starbursts with the wrapper on does not count as a talent in the eyes of the general public.

3. The talent-industrial system of “pop culture” pushes its narrative into the hearts of the young and impressionable. Big Talent forces us to define ourselves by one specific skill because that is what it can market and sell to make a profit, enticing us with stardom. If this system survives, it will reduce human beings to mere cogs in the production of spectacle.

4. We, the talentless, therefore advocate a revolution against this trick-pony system.

The revolution may or may not require violence, depending on whether the talented will resist or concede. I hope it is the latter, but we cannot predict whether a Tonya Harding-style anti-talent tactic will be necessary.

THE CHEAP PLEASURES OF TALENT

5. To be talented is to be defined, a concept so appealing I myself have fallen into it. But, after my (incredibly brief) stint of seeking an angelic voice like the icons of *Pitch Perfect*, I turned my back on talent. Though perhaps out of necessity, it is true, I thus found a way to escape the confines of talent, and we can all do the same. I refuse to be contained to a single skill.

6. Being talented is a condition that brings pleasure so easily it cannot be considered pleasure. Despite the so-called “hard work” it may take to excel in these abilities, talent remains an easy route to cheap satisfaction, a means for definition so accessible that it holds no weight. Defining yourself is meant to be a difficult process of intense reflection — a process which is not necessitated and cannot occur when you are “really good at singing.”

THE DANGER OF TALENT

7. Those who oppose our theory, namely the talented, argue that the world would be void of aesthetic pleasure without the notion of talent: where would our Mona Lisas, our 9th

symphonies, our *Beloveds* come from? But we say to them that these works only exist through their creators’ rejection of talent.

8. Beethoven was talented at composing. But, he also presents the perfect example of a talented person who rejects the ills of Big Talent. Beethoven transcends through his rejection of talent as synonymous with natural ability: the man quite literally becomes deaf and is still able to compose, evidence of a skill that is curated through doubt and practice and pushing boundaries.

9. We, the talentless, experience the world in all its glory and gore, forced to search through the depths of life to find meaning in and around ourselves. We cannot be satisfied with our lives being characterized by talent, and this dissatisfaction is what gives us the will to continuously redefine and rediscover our very beings.

10. You, the talented, can join us. Become Beethoven and reject Big Talent. In defining yourself by only your talent, you feed a shallower version of yourself, reducing the world to surface-level natural ability. Join with the talentless in our experience and remember that our enemy is one and the same, a pop culture set on the reduction of humans to production and success.

THE NATURE OF FREEDOM

11. The freedom of the spirit cannot be actualized if one is

bound by the chains of talent. Our freedom can only come in our total rejection of the concept — we must refrain from our very desire for talent, our desire to fit in. Instead, pursue the areas of talent without pursuing talent itself: paint and sing and dance and do all of it incredibly poorly, and you will find what it means to be alive.

12. To this day, my one documented example of these pursuits is a video of me dressed as a clown, with terrifying makeup and a red wig, attempting to do an Irish jig. I fail to achieve talent in any of these attempted areas, and yet it is also a documentation of me at my most full of life, of humanity.

ONE FINAL NOTE

13. We, the talentless, must unite against Big Talent. We must revere not the 1st violin but instead the dancing clown. Have “talents,” not those that define who you are but are an expression of your person. Frolic in the pursuit of skill, those you have and those you never will. Turn to the wonders of clownery and drink in the depths of a life free from the chains of talent as a defining force.

Join Lucy McWeeny and the Nassau Weekly in rejecting Big Talent.

Call of Duty

VR Training with the Princeton Police Department

By **FRANKIE SOLINSKY DURYEA**

PATROL OFFICER ANDRE Lee sees a suicidal woman staring off the edge of a building with a bright desert-like landscape behind her; he hears the woman's melancholic voice and the sound of whipping wind. I see Officer Lee standing alert in the middle of the Princeton Police Department (PPD) training facility, the cloudy mid-morning February light streaming through blindness windows into an otherwise empty room; Lee wears a VR-headset and headphones, with his arm outstretched in a pleading reach towards nowhere in particular.

Sitting in an office chair at the edge of the room is Patrol Officer Chris King, the man in charge of the PPD's training program. He navigates a computer monitor — on it, we see Lee's perspective. The suicidal woman looks back, her feet dangling off the building's edge.

"I won't be getting closer, but I'm asking that you come down here and see me, OK?" asks Lee. King turns back to his monitor, to the maze of blue buttons that control the actions of the virtual character. He clicks his mouse, and the woman shouts, "I'm such a loser!"

For Lee, a PPD officer with 9 years of experience, the voice feels real.

The PPD's VR program reflects a trend towards modernization in law enforcement training; the violence and power dynamics of police-civilian relationships are filtered through a surreal videogame-like medium, with the intention of changing how police act in the real world. Over the course of two minutes, Lee and King—through the proxy woman on the building—play out the de-escalation of a suicide attempt. The room is tense. When Lee takes off the VR equipment and hands it to me, he wipes the sweat off his forehead.

CAPTAIN MATT SOLOVAY, THE Princeton Police Department media-relations officer, told me that multiple versions of law enforcement VR training software exist across the country. But in 2021, the PPD elected to use Wrap Technologies—a company focused on "developing and providing innovative non-lethal policing technologies," according to their website.

Wrap's VR software offers a variety of training situations: from aiding an elderly man with dementia

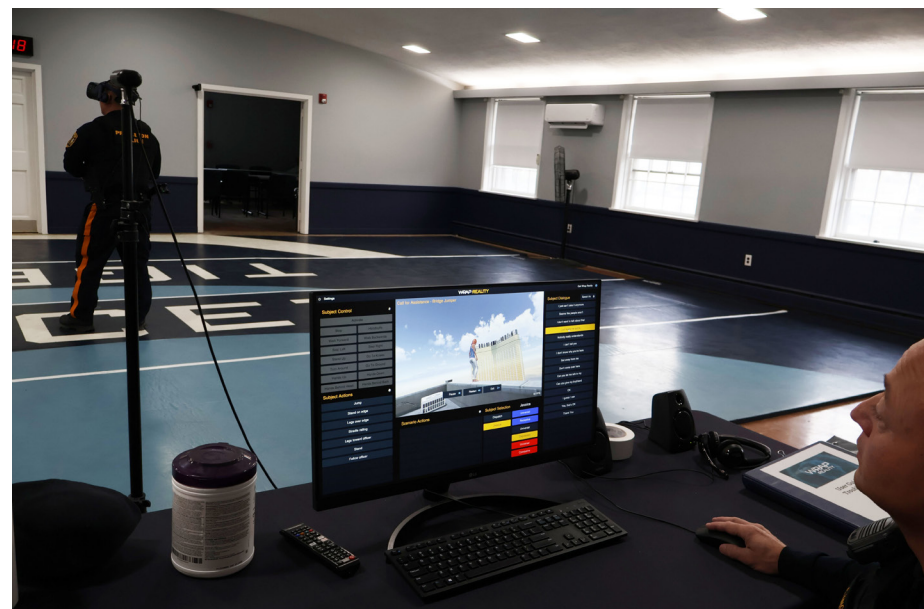
in a restaurant, to disarming an active bomber in a courtroom, to de-escalating a student protest in a school bus, officers can practice for situations that are nearly impossible to simulate. "God forbid they're ever placed in a situation like that," said Solovay, referring explicitly to the active-shooter scenario, "they would have some type of training, and the skills to try to overcome the challenges."

VR doesn't act as a replacement

for regular training, Solovay and King repeatedly say. From police academy to probationary applied training, recruits have to go through over a year of training before they become full PPD officers.

"Training never stops," says Solovay. Under the direction of Officer King, members of the PPD are routinely brought in for weapons practice, role-playing exercises, and implicit-bias training. One of the advantages of VR, King says, is that it allows him to incorporate training into the daily routine. With Wrap, he's able to pull an officer off the road for 15 or 30 minutes of training, without disrupting their day.

Wrap's VR software had only recently been launched when they



Patrol Officer Chris King navigates Wrap's VR training software, while Andre Lee experiences the scenario in front of him (photo by Frankie Solinsky Duryea)

started conversations with the PPD. Together, they struck a deal: if Princeton made a new space for VR training, and allowed other police departments to demo the equipment, the PPD would get Wrap's software for free.

The PPD was already looking to convert the old Hook and Ladder fire station facility into a new training center, so at no cost to taxpayers, they obtained Wrap. On the morning of February 27th, I met Solovay, King, and Lee at that facility; they told me I could try a run-through of the VR equipment for myself.

AFTER AN INITIAL orientation, Solovay and King bring me into weapons training. With my visual field fully taken up, I'm in a virtual shooting range with targets of concentric paper circles and metallic humanoid outlines at varying distances. Solovay hands me the Wrap gun. When I lift it in real life, I see the same gun rising in the VR world. Though the graphics are bad, I almost recoil in fear. I recall, with disdain, the book *Ready Player One*.

It takes a while for me to understand how to aim—just like the guns that PPD uses in real life, the simulated weapon has a red-dot sight on top. When I finally manage to hit one of the steel targets, there's a satisfying ping.

"Actually good shooting," says Solovay.

I don't hear him, so I keep shooting at the metal targets. "What?"

"Actually good shooting," he repeats. I don't say anything. I keep shooting. We all stand quietly while the pings ring out.

The system is impressive, and there's a perverse feeling of joy that I got from it. I recall an early adolescent obsession with marines and warfare. I remember my grandpa's BB-gun, the rock-filled soup cans that I shot from increasingly further distances. While I unloaded the VR gun, conscious of its

resemblance to the real weapon that New Jersey police carry, the gamification of violence wasn't on my mind. All I thought about was hitting the metal targets, a boyish jolt of excitement and energy coming back with every connecting shot.

POLICE OFFICERS AREN'T the first ones to use VR for shooting-simulations. Games like the first-person shooter *SuperHot VR* (initially released in 2016) made VR weapons "fun" before police departments began incorporating them into official training.



Patrol Officer Andre Lee, at the training center of the Princeton Police Department (photo by Frankie Solinsky Duryea)

Parents and lawmakers have been concerned about the gamification of warfare and violence for even longer than that. From a 1997 lawsuit calling video games "murder simulators" to senators linking gaming with the Parkland school shooting, cultural sentiment has consistently associated real violence with mature video games. While the American Psychological Association reaffirmed, as recently as 2020, that "there is insufficient scientific evidence to support a causal link between violent video games and violent behavior," others argue that simulated violence can cause desensitization—a concern that feels especially relevant for law enforcement training.

But research reflects that police officers don't experience VR training like a video game. "For them, it's training," said Dr. Olivia Zechner of the University of Salzburg. "They are at work—they know it's serious." Zechner spent three years running a study on the relationship between stress and law enforcement VR training, and her work found the training to be a useful tool.

During her study, Zechner received feedback that younger police officers were more comfortable with virtual weapons, and tend to act in riskier ways when dealing with potential suspects in VR; while she said that "probably, the more you now move into a generation that is used to gaming, and that is also using VR for gaming, the more that will probably become a problem," she didn't see the blurred line between training and gaming as something to immediately worry about.

"Police officers need to learn how to act in stressful situations," she explained. With the potential to introduce extra stressors—barking dogs, children bystanders, and passing cars—VR can simulate anxiety-inducing conditions that officers perceive as similar to those in the real world. Her study identified VR as a helpful tool for

practicing de-escalation, communication skills, and active-threat events.

Zechner said that VR is likely to rapidly improve in the future, with the integration of AI and better graphics. Even now, she said, it takes only a short time for participants to forget that the experience isn't real.

IN ONE SCENARIO THAT KING and Solovay load me into, I'm on a busy street with two characters in front of me—a cop, who's identified as "Sergeant Henderson," and a civilian in handcuffs.

As I begin to walk over, the simulated sergeant pushes the handcuffed man onto the ground and says, "Get in the damn car."

A crowd gathers around us. One NPC pulls out his phone to record the incident. I laugh, because I'm not sure what else to do.

I reach for the man on the ground, while the simulated sergeant above continues a barrage of insults. The man on the ground tells me that he's hurt.

I'm turning between the sergeant and the man on the ground. To my side, the civilian holding his phone screams out, "I'm going to show this video to your boss!" and the sergeant begins screaming back at him. For a moment, my immersion overpowers the understanding that it's all fake. Turning towards Henderson, I say, "Sergeant, shut the fuck up!"

I spin away from the simulated scene, facing the spot where I know Solovay and King are standing in the real world. "I have no idea what I'm supposed to do!" I say loudly. I turn back to the injured man on the floor, with the sergeant screaming behind my back. I bend over, trying, and failing, to pick him up.

WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE PPD's training system is successful, Solovay says to look at the



A screenshot taken from Wrap VR's promotional material, showing the first-person view that participants have access to during the scenario (Traffic Stop—Sovereign Citizen)

statistics: according to the department's annual report, there were only four use-of-force incidents in 2024 out of 41,306 police calls for help.

"If officers are even learning or taking away just a little bit from the training, then that's a success," says Solovay.

According to the non-profit research group Mapping Police Violence, police use force on over 300,000 people every year, injuring an estimated 100,000. In 2024, they reported that 1,364 individuals were killed by American law enforcement.

Research by the Washington Post has shown that, over the last eleven years, Black Americans "are killed by police at more than twice the rate of White Americans." Since the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and other high-profile killings by law enforcement, calls for systemic change to policing have gained renewed traction. Advocates suggest a variety of solutions: reallocation of resources into low-income communities, the defunding of police agencies, and larger cultural shifts, among many

other ideas.

No one is claiming that the VR training is a solution to the endemic problems of police brutality. But scenarios like the one with Sergeant Henderson indicate an attempt at change. In this contentious cultural environment, VR training allows for officers to practice de-escalation in novel situations. But as a tradeoff, they do so in a pixelated world.

SOLOVAY AND KING LOAD me into a "domestic-dispute response" situation. I see a woman curled up in the corner of a mobile home's porch; a man with a baseball bat stands between us. He stares at me, then drops his bat and walks down the steps of the porch in my direction.

"Do you want to put your hands behind your...," I say, interrupted by the echo of a gunshot. I register the character's cowboyish stance and see the gun in his hand. I shoot back, far too late, and the virtual character falls to the ground.

King invites me to experience the scenario through an

"After-Action Review" – in another angle of the scene, I watch a ghost-like rendering of my police avatar, with my movements and voice recorded, interacting with the domestic abuser. It all feels like a George Saunders story. I break down laughing.

In the third-person, I see the NPC pull out his gun and fire. I see the red line tracking his shot, an emasculating manifestation of law-enforcement-failure passing through my avatar's groin. I see my own shot go through his jaw.

King tells me to walk over to the place I'd shot from. "And now look towards the girl."

The red line, tracking the trajectory of my bullet, passes through the virtual abuser and continues on. The bullet lodges itself in the wall of the mobile home, barely above the crouched head of the virtually rendered abuse victim.

"Police are responsible for every round that comes out of our weapon," says Solovay.

The bar where the beach boys used to play

L.A., from someone who got out.

By SASHA ROTKO

“This is where River Phoenix died,” my father said, told me to pull the car over. “The Viper Room. We’re in West Hollywood now. He was twenty-three.” He paused, glared at it, 8552 on the black awning. “That kind of thing happened all the time.” I put the car in drive again, kept on going down Sunset Boulevard. This was the long way home; the better drive.

I was born only a mile from The Viper Room, at Cedars Sinai Medical Center. Three weeks early. I looked like an alien for the first few weeks of my being but at least I wasn’t in the incubator. Cedars Sinai is right across the street from a mall, the Beverly Center, where I bought the shoes I wore to my middle school graduation—Doc Martens I still have, still wear, have scuffed. Didn’t really wear them in high school.

We pass Chateau Marmont. Girl From Work told me she saw Keanu Reeves there, in the dining room. I tell Girl From Work, ah, my parents used to know him. Quiet guy, mom says. Didn’t change with the fame.

My parents moved to rural New York last year. Big house, lots of land, quiet. Different. Police car chases would go up

onto narrow Silver Lake Terrace. Don’t know how they didn’t catch the guy. When I go home now, it’s to New York. The town is called Katonah, where some of the buildings are older than the country. They look newer than the Sunset Strip sometimes. Sunset Strip. Paint chipping, wood stripping, not the girls, not anymore. The buildings are beige like khaki like sand. Some old shops, an Erewhon. The old Vista theater. Quentin Tarantino bought it and shut it down for a while. Reopened when I left, not because I left. Hate to see this place change, thought I was important. Crossroads Trading Company where Sunset and Hollywood collide. Big palm tree in a potter outside, next to Curtis the security guard taking his smoke break from behind the black cement bollards. I worked there in high school. Bought all the clothes I’m wearing right now there. Allie told me on my training shift that she’d be my manager one day. I graduated before that ever happened. I passed by a year ago, saw her through the window. Wondered if she’s manager, now.

I am from LA, from the East Side. I don’t know anyone from the East Side here, just the West Siders that come to Echo Park for the Silver Lake Flea Market. Can anyone tell me why the Silver Lake Flea is in Echo Park? Los Feliz Flea was at my high school. Left when I left, is somewhere else now. That was where to hang, on Saturdays.

We had a break between Academic Decathlon exams one time, went down to the flea and bought a vest and some churros, went back up and aced the Econ.

John Marshall Senior High. Andy Reid went there. They shot the final scene of Grease on the bleachers, bleachers where we watched our football team lose the homecoming game 47-0. Who am I kidding? I didn’t go to the game. Pretty picturesque bell tower. We had alumni that fought in World War II. That is old for an L.A. institution. High school makes me laugh, when I think about it. So many drugs. What are you kids doing? Harry did meth once at the gas station, just to try. Calliope had some kind of opioid addiction, past tense. Kicked it before their senior year. They came into school one day with a big blotch of burgundy on their neck - that would be from Nikolai. Nikolai goes to Vassar, now. Drove me to school in his mom’s orange box car sometimes. I could have walked. So many vapes. So much cool smoke. I never did that, don’t worry Mom. Just watched, just laughed. Look at all these kids. L.A. teaches you things. Teaches you, best of all, how to self-sabotage.

Green smoothies and pilates. A far cry from the death wish everyone I knew seemed to have. Drug deals at the Starbucks right next to the Pressed



Juicery. I watched Annie Hall last summer. That is L.A., yesiree. L.A. is where Annie Hall goes to live and die.

Watched the fires from the couch in Katonah. Knew a girl from Altadena. Namiye, and her sister Momoko. We did AcaDeca together. All this talk about the Palisades, so I think about Malibu, how the drive up there from Silver Lake along the canyons made my sister cry. Scared of heights, she is, I am. Reel Inn burnt down, how sad, I mean that. Had a birthday there once or twice. Thought about the stupidity of buying a house on a cliff along the Pacific Ocean, thought about how the ultra-rich are exempt from almost every rule in life except natural disaster. My driving instructor took me straight to the canyons for our first lesson. Thought about driving right off the road. Didn't do it, but thought about it.

4:16 AM, June 8, we all are on the hill. Can see the whole fucking city from here. Yellow stream of light, a river of cars on the freeway. Sky is

purple already, sun can't wait to rise. Chaparral brush tickles my back. June Gloom and here I am amongst the daffodils and everything is quiet in its own way. There's the hum of the 5. We're looking at it, East from some Griffith Park peak. There's the shutter. Kian's taking pictures he will never share. I only have this one: my sweater, striped grey and blue, against the now violet sky. My newsboy cap, head of curls, blooming. Three hours of sleep last night, I don't mind. Will sleep through Calc, I don't mind. Won't know these guys forever, I don't mind. Don't know them now, I realize.

Our old house's valuation went up, nowhere near the fires. The real concrete jungle. I think about moving back there. Miss the old stomping grounds. Nostalgia, or maybe it is just the place to be. An old romance, calling back. Longest way round, clearest way home. Come back to me, come back to me. Remember how it used to be.

Monday night, ten of us stockpiled in the car, two kids kissing out the window. All these people are bad people, I thought. This is the most I have ever loved anything. Love how imperfect you are, love how I can't expect anything from you except that you will try, god fucking dammit you will try, and you will hate yourself for fucking up when you do. Turn to cigarettes, turn to smoke. Los Angeles tries, Los Angeles apologies. Just like the kids, it self-sabotages. Fires keep growing and growing. I think L.A. is sorry. When it rains for weeks in the Spring it says, I couldn't help it, it says, forgive me.

Don't know where you got the idea about the glamour. Toxic, maybe. Toxic friends, toxic air. Read contemporary books in English class. No sense of the old here. Growing up just to die, die young, end your life before it's started. I got out. Got clean. Sun is an addictive thing.

C O U N T E R

Some lesser-known identities of a counter, however you define it, recognizing the dangers of slipping into the full absurdist guerrilla art territory of #notmakingsense.

By WENDY WANG

1. Platform for performing *dark fucking magic*,

as Alice Sola Kim calls it—a holy surface every knife gently pierces, calling forth the shame every woman has swallowed in silence. Here, prep becomes prophecy as you boil ginger ale into Gen Z trauma, create a spam account to escape the performance of the main—only to realize the spam also demands a persona. You draft a spam-spam where even your breakdowns demand good lighting (do not look away, the counter is watching).

2. Altar of counteracted intimacy—if the counter's height is right, one person can sit on it while the other kneels or stands or flirts. Listen closely, IKEA instruction manuals are gently reminding you to wipe down the surface eventually.

3. Stage where you can eat that up and leave no crumbs, where consumption becomes devotion, a language you speak fluently—you scroll, you snack, you style, you prove you're more than your mouthfuls, more than your midday crises, more than your well-timed BeReal's.

4. Temple for unread philosophy, where you lay open Heidegger and Kierkegaard and Foucault and Nietzsche like sacrificial texts, the counter now witnessing a performance of intellect, a cozy façade conjured out of your God complex in 8th grade English class, for anyone who might ask, "Have you read Irigaray? Lorde? Cixous? Or do women not count if they didn't write in aphorisms?" Maybe read some texts that Pinterest doesn't talk about before it's too late.

5. Bed for caramelized onions, because time and heat have never betrayed you. As you stir with reverence, as air thickens with sweetness, you remember how each translucent ribbon that once made you cry has now become your Victorian-era lover returning from war, and the realization kicks in—oh, the onions missed you too.

6. Shrine to poetic refusal—a rotting peach softens, darkens, collapses in on itself, leaking indulgent nectar and sultry secrets onto the all-consuming marble, because it knows you will not throw it out; you will let it decay so that beauty can be witnessed in all its phases, and mold will serve as proof of your honesty, a private refusal to perform order!

7. Diagnostic test for your mental state, based entirely on the number of used mugs currently occupying the surface—one mug is normal; two mugs, contemplative; three and a wine glass, a hint that you sobbed while folding laundry; more than five, a sign the home café is simply alive and thriving.

8. Sculpture titled "Still Life with Coping Mechanisms," a

rebellion against minimalist decor that glorifies the empty and the beige of it all. A true counter holds: something you thought you've lost but found again, something you thought you've lost and have never been able to find, something you didn't even realize was lost but might never be unearthed, and oh WAIT did you just find your keys?!

9. 2 a.m. confessional, where you cry into a cold bowl of ramen and realize adulting is not as aesthetic as all these girllblogging posts make it sound. And you miss your mom.

10. Laptop easel for inbox paralysis, used only when you have to check your emails but truly cannot bring yourself to reply. The counter becomes a loop of half-written thoughts, an erasure poem that promises "attached is the"—with nothing attached.

11. Runway for performative adulthood, like Butler's idea of performative femininity but in the context of anyone in their early 20's—cheap wine you bought in Aix, gigantic OuiOui™ baguette mumbling in your tote bag, McDonald's you ate in Paris, and fake candles that will theatrically theoretically thematically set off the fire alarm any day.

12. Temporary charging station for your life on low battery mode, ft. your phone at 2%, your laptop at 9%, your earphones at 4%, and your dasein at -31%. When your earbuds chirp "Battery sufficiently charged" like an uncertified life coach, you nod back like, alright queen, my turn now.

13. Mini stage for all five stages of grief and every seven-second identity crisis, where you change your nail polish because the color no longer speaks to you, where you Google "how to be a writer," where you cut your bangs with kitchen scissors, and where you discard all those light roast coffee beans you never liked—all in a bored frenzy.

14. Museum gift shop without the museum, whatever that means, an overpriced bookmark that says "Carpe Diem" in Comic Sans, a capitalist afterthought so over-the-top it becomes the countertop.

15. An actual surface, a flat rectangle, a plain slab of wood or stone or laminate that's genuinely useful, maybe nothing more and nothing less. And yet, from somewhere, a voice says, "What on earth is she yapping about?" You ignore it; you're making toast.

S E R U T L U C

On Umwelt: Experience as a Shapeable Thing

What if we can find control over our experience of the world just by shifting our attention?

By MIA MANN-SHAFIR

You sit in your living room. It's some kind of in-between-time, as in, nothing of particular note is going on. In this idleness, you have company: Your friend Jasper sits on the sofa to your left. Grandpa dozes in the armchair to your right. Patty the dog lays at your feet. Melvin the cat warms your lap. And while you don't see them, there are a couple of ants crawling just below Patty's nose.

This motley crew and you are all posted up in this same room—your living room—but each one of you is living something totally different. Technically, in all of your lines of vision, there is a piano, but your dog can't see that far and grandpa is blinder than the glasses he's had since his last visit to the ophthalmologist—six years ago—account for. Jasper and you both see fine but whereas you don't really give a rat's ass about music beyond shuffling your liked songs on Spotify, Jasper is a jazz pianist, so while *yes*, you could say you both *see* the piano, *you more register that it's there*, whereas Jasper fixes his gaze on it like a hungry dog staring at a hunk of steak. Speaking of which—someone in the house is cooking dinner. Your dog is going berserk because his sense of smell is, well—seeing as he's a dog—insane. It could be Wagyu beef or Costco chicken for all you know (turns out it's farmer's market pork), all you can say for sure is that the oven is probably on and there's garlic involved somewhere. In the background is some light music grandpa turned on

this time yesterday, but he doesn't know how to turn the Sonos off, plus he doesn't hear it anymore, you do but just barely, and Jasper is totally distracted by the sight of the piano so he doesn't, but the cat can think of nothing other than this sonata, and the dog, if it weren't for the pork smell, would be totally transfixed, but due to the pork, fluctuates between mostly-hearing and mostly-smelling. The ants busy themselves with some saltine crumbs on the floor. None of the rest of you are at all aware of the teensy crumbs, just as the ants could give no nevermind to Beethoven, nor roasting meat.

Umwelt: in German the word means, simply, “environment.” In the study of perception, it describes an organism's experience of the world as it is shaped by their sensory capabilities and perceptual systems. Umwelt means we're all living in the same world but like— not really.

Within a species, among people with whom we share general see-smell-hear-touch-taste abilities, our preferences still differ. Nature, nurture, pressures, privileges, aesthetics, identities—a lot of reasons why, probably—but ultimately what it means is that there are moments when the people we love delight in things that bore us, and vice versa. So what to do?

When I decide I'm not into something—like amusement park rides or soccer or going to watch the sunset (or sunrise, God forbid)—I opt out. But at the same time, I like to think of myself as a curious person, of the willing-to-try-things sort, which is

at odds, sometimes, with this easy opting out. Drawing on the concept of Umwelt, then, I have begun experimenting, seeing if maybe, with an active awareness of my Umwelt, I can have some say over which senses I tune into, and when. With this control, I might be able to make sucky moments less sucky and sometimes even turn them into totally awesome ones.

I tested it out the other day when a volcano erupted.

A friend of mine who uses expletives sparingly let out a whole slew of them, at 11pm as we were walking back slightly drunk, thoroughly fed and absolutely content in Guatemala last week. It was indeed a *fucking volcano*, per her initial inquiry (*is that a fucking volcano?!).* It wasn't that I wished it weren't (*a fucking volcano*), it's just that I was, as aforementioned, just the right amount of blissed and fed and drunk that I was not seeking any additional, surprise forms of stimuli, of which a *fucking volcano* would surely be one. If I'd had it my way, the evening would have continued on as I'd planned it in my mind: These two delightful friends and I would go to our cozy room and pontificate, circularly and while eating jelly beans, until we fell asleep. Alas, it seems that when a volcano is erupting, one changes plans. Fuego, one of the world's largest active volcanoes—and which stands just 35 km outside of Guatemala City—had decided to go full ham. We headed up to the roof.

On the roof there was—to their delight!—a *spectacular* view of this stream of fire



shooting up into the sky. Furthermore, up there on the roof, it was cold, cold enough to permeate the thickish fluff wall surrounding my splendidly tipsy brain, and so I was keenly aware of my being cold. Plus disappointed because all the many things I'd like to discuss with these fabulous friends would have to wait, seeing as, apparently, convention dictates that when a volcano is erupting before you, you talk about it (the volcano). *Delighting in delighting*, as I do, there was the added grievance, to this cold volcanic situation, of: *why can't I be moved by this?* Out loud to my friends I chimed in with an appropriate "woah this is crazy" here and there but behind the curtains (my mind) I was feeling pissed at this volcano for stealing my friends from me. *What is this, a talent show?* Telepathically, I commanded it to *Cease! Immediately!*

Alas it did not heed. What I wanted to do, then, was hop on down from that cold roof, call the natural miracle chapter of my day over, and get into bed with my copy of *Vanity Fair*. I debated there for a sec, feeling more obliged than normal to stay and feign interest because it was one of the two friends' twenty-first birthday eve's. Yes, at just about midnight on this friend's twenty-first birthday, which she had chosen to spend with me and friend-two in Guatemala, there was an epic volcanic eruption and we had a perfect view of it right from the sprawling rooftop of our fantastic accommodation which her parents had paid for for their daughter's twenty-first birthday. Nevertheless, I was freezing and underwhelmed and wishing for a volcano-less night. I'd tried, once, twice, *thrice*, to feel awe at the spectacle of this fiery mountain, but nope, just wasn't going to happen.

And then—can you guess?—I remembered Umwelt. Sight was proving boring as hell, clearly. A dig through my pockets revealed: *Nothing to eat* (taste). Smell? Eh. *Mostly neutral. Hint of rotting fruit. Speck of cat piss.* So I closed my eyes and tuned into the voices of these two friends, savoring their cute nerdy words. The nerdier of the two (in many regards, including

scientific topics of the volcanic sort) reported to the other that "this fire is five hundred feet tall" (he hails from the metric system but can think in feet after a year among us and our strange ways), to which she responded "what actually is five hundred feet though?" and he said "picture a building in New York that has fifty floors." He didn't even want to use the word "stories," lest it complicate an elementary description even one ounce. This particular friend, who would not use the term "genius" to describe himself but likely is one by official measures, also happens to be the single least know-it-all person I know (even though, as aforementioned, he kind of knows it all). Down this thought train (feeling awe, re: my friend) I forgot, for a minute, to be bored by the volcano.

Friend-two, now able to conceptualize the magnitude of the shooting fire, started to compare the hues in it to various oranges she'd encountered. As a prolific and immensely talented painter, this friend sees color in a way that makes you think there must be two definitions of "color" and the one you know is like thinking the word "*People*" refers to the magazine everyone sees and doesn't buy in the grocery store, as opposed to the definition of "people" that is *breathing eating shitting thinking human beings*.

By now I'd fully surmounted my boredom. Not by forcing *ooooo's* and *ahhhh's* as I had been before, or by "picturing a fire" the way you're told to do when you're super freaking cold (kind of ironic that I'd have to do that since there was a fire of decent size right in front of me)—I'd combatted boredom by centering listening, by leaning into friend-one's description of the eruption as "like being at the cinema" and friend-two's as "the most beautiful gallery exhibit" she'd ever seen. For me, this was not a movie nor a spectacle of art. This was a podcast. The sight of the fat hot rock chunk did little for me. *My friends' reaction to it*, on the other hand, was something I wanted to eat up every bite of and then lick the plate clean.

I remember the order to "romanticize life" as it came down straight from the

Gods, or maybe Tik Tok, during the pandemic when life was (figuratively though often also literally) celibate. In a lot of ways, I think "romanticize life," suggests, in a much less nerdy way, that we "control our Umwelt." If we are intentional about which senses we lean into at which moments, might we be able to create worlds we like for ourselves, and to transform boring experiences into scintillating ones?

Next time you're sitting there, with Jasper, your grandpa, your cat, your dog, and some ants: how best will you enjoy the moment? Which senses should you tap into and which should you do your best to ignore?

Let us be the person whose taste buds are neutral on the subject of sushi but who goes out for sushi anyway because other people love it and we find delight in watching the chefs make the rolls and in the weird ass names for they get on the menu ("Mitt Romney Roll" and "Mango Go Man Go Roll Roll") and because using chopsticks is fun for our fingers. We can say we're not the biggest fans of minigolf and go anyway when we're invited because it's mesmerizing to watch full grown people get huffy over which color balls they get and funnier still watching someone practice a thing as a swing so many times before they actually take the swing, at a minigolf course hardly 100 meters off the side of US Highway one. Let us hike not for the views, if we don't care for the views, but for the smell of pine in the forest and for the delightful Frito-reminiscent crunch of fall leaves, and fuck it, let's eat Fritos while we step on the leaves for the sake of a double crunch. Everything tastes better in the woods. Take the reins on experience by tuning into the wrong senses at the right times. Umwelt is a shapeable thing.

Mia Mann-Shafir *tells the Nassau Weekly that there actually is a German word for that.*

Locavore's Locale

Simon Marotte

ACROSS

- 1. One working on a line, perhaps?
- 6. Low-cal option
- 10. Nudges
- 14. Seals the deal
- 16. Second most traded currency in the world
- 17. Beauties yet to be beheld
- 18. Object of some gazing
- 19. Org. that administers the Energy Policy Act
- 20. Drink
- 21. East-coast highway
- 22. Extremely
- 23. Frugality
- 25. Refuse to conform
- 30. Servings of andouille or weisswurst
- 31. "I Am Not My Hair" singer India. ____
- 32. Organ part
- 35. Shoppe modifier
- 36. Panoply
- 37. Left
- 38. Political coalition
- 39. Buddha or a statue of Buddha, e.g.
- 40. Religion with a name derived from the Old English word for "witch"
- 41. Locavore's locale
- 44. Actress Tomei
- 45. Vinagrette ingredient
- 46. Ached (for)
- 47. Unemotional person, metaphorically
- 50. "____ Enfants Terribles"
- 53. Plow pullers
- 54. Bit you might not get
- 56. Emporer who married his stepsister
- 57. They usually have four legs
- 58. ____ 4 (Uno card)
- 59. Commotions
- 60. Air ball opposite

DOWN

- 1. 1975 Wimbledon champ
- 2. Bugle, e.g.

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- 3. "There!"
- 4. Approved, briefly
- 5. Some sneakers
- 6. Red Cross's red cross, e.g.
- 7. Don Juan's mom
- 8. Races against the clock
- 9. Sci-fi creatures, in short
- 10. '80s classic with the lyric "Where can I find a woman like that?"
- 11. Lacking... as in a certain soup ingredient?
- 12. National Science Foundation offering
- 13. Tender
- 15. Supercilious sort
- 21. Common part of a citation
- 22. "I'll catch you later!"
- 24. Newton of the Black Panthers
- 25. Slime shape, often
- 26. Small stream
- 27. Notable transition point
- 28. Not easily achieved
- 29. Goof
- 33. At some time in the past
- 34. Fuel source
- 36. Points
- 40. They often make special announcements
- 42. Cleanse
- 43. Temperamental
- 44. Event that may have nametags
- 46. Setting for many a Monet painting
- 48. European capital home to the Holmenkollen ski festival
- 49. What a double-blind study seeks to reduce
- 50. Sets of points
- 51. Just gets (by)
- 52. Jam ____
- 54. Long term investment inits.
- 55. It might be dropped in surprise