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Religion

cryptography



the bowdoin review

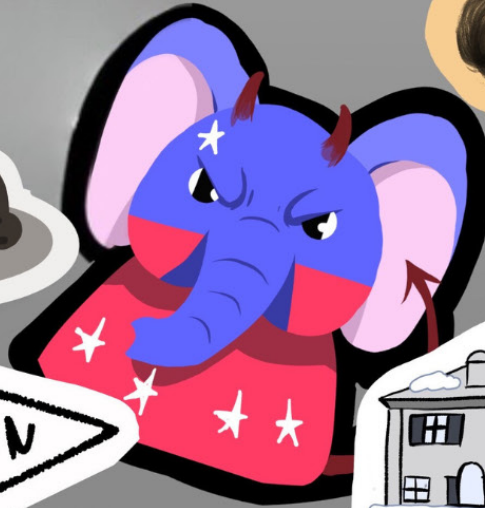
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Letter from the Editors

As 2023 winds to a close, we present the 28th edition of The Bowdoin Review. Thanks to the incredible efforts of our writers, our artists, our poets, our editors, and our layout and design team, this is our fourth print of this calendar year.

This is the last print which features us both as Editors-in-Chief. When we took over the club in 2022, we were down to 7 members, most of whom we begged to stay on. Over the last year and a half, our small club has undergone some massive changes. We have started to publish art and poetry, we have hosted several events on campus, and our membership has risen to 30. In many ways, this edition encapsulates our work and vision for the club as a whole.

In this issue, our writers evaluate administrative bloat in higher education (Lance Dinino, p1), the elderly in government (Zak Asplin, p8), security dilemmas in cryptography (Andrew Jorge, p11), free will and faith in the context of Hinduism (Sunny Das, p21), and scapegoats in the rise of the far-right (Dorian Maillot, p25). Our artists use light and shadow to explore surrealism (Alfonso Garcia, p15), distance and the human figure to explore cultural and gender identity (Mei Bock, p17), and colour and physicality of media to explore the beauty and energy of sailing (Lauren Russler, p19). Our poets consider the passion and brokenness of love (Rin Pastor, p29), the uncertainty of the liminal space between childhood and adulthood (Charlotte Iannone, p30), the conflict between the good memories and the difficult ones left by the loss of a father's love (Sydney Pine, p31), and the cyclical nature of the seasons and of life (Dylan Beckett, p32).

As the days continue to wane and the end of the semester makes itself known in the form of papers, presentations, and exams, we hope you find the passion of our writers, artists, and poets invigorating. To friends and family members who will read this over the winter break as a memento brought home from Bowdoin College: we hope you are as proud of our students as we are.

NOAH SAPERSTEIN JOANNE DU
Editor-in-Chief Editor-in-Chief



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Death By a Thousand Emails: How Administrative Bloat is Killing American Higher Education

By Lance Dinino

In recent years, Yale has achieved the unfortunate distinction of having more administrators and managers than undergraduate students. For its fewer than five thousand undergraduate students, Yale proudly employs an army of over 5,460 administrators. Like many of its peer institutions, Yale faces an epidemic of administrative bloat: a self-perpetuating ecosystem of expensive career administrators who are far removed from the classroom. In the last three decades, the number of administrators and managers employed by American colleges and universities has ballooned, dwarfing the growth of student and faculty populations. From 1987 to 2012, 517,636 administrators and professional employees were hired at colleges and universities across the country—an average of 87 hires for every working day. After disproportionate growth, these oversized administrative states needlessly increase costs and encumber the operation of institutions.

As Johns Hopkins political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg describes in his book, *The Fall of Faculty*, the American university has undergone many evolutions in its lifetime. As recently as the 1970s, schools were heavily influenced by faculty ideas and concerns. Top administrators were typically drawn from teaching staff and many mid level managerial tasks went to faculty members. These academics typically participated on a temporary basis and cycled in and out of teaching roles. Because professors were so involved in university management, presidents and deans could do little without faculty support. The college's core educational mission was hard to ignore with adminis-

tration composed primarily of semi-retired academics. Administrative tasks were a means to an academic end. As demand for services and the complexities of modern administrative requirements grew, however, a professional management class rapidly emerged.

Compared to academic leadership of the past, today's professional administrators view management as an end in and of itself. Most have no faculty experience and come directly from management degree programs or other non-teaching roles in higher education. The Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Survey (IPEDS) defines administrators as “staff whose job it is to plan, direct, or coordinate policies [and] programs, [tasks that] may include some supervision of other workers.” The IPEDS further states that although “Postsecondary Deans should be classified in this category as well,” the vast majority of administrators do no teaching or research. In many cases, their jobs are unrelated to the most crucial university functions. These career managers serve a bureaucracy that is fundamentally disconnected from the classroom experience.

The first problem with this self-reproducing professional class is its overwhelming cost. Administrative costs account for nearly a quarter of total spending by American universities, according to Department of Education data. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) found that, across the entire higher education landscape, spending on administration per student increased by 61% between 1993 and 2007. This growth extends even to public universities, like the UNC System, which “saw a nearly 50 percent, inflation-adjusted increase” in 11 short years.



Alfonso Garcia

This growth is unsurprising given administrators are exceedingly well compensated compared to faculty. Presidents at both public and private universities often make comparable salaries to business executives of similar size institutions, and receive extensive perks typically associated with corporate executives. Within middle management, armies of deans and provosts typically make salaries comfortably in the six-figures.

Ginsberg describes the case of a Purdue administrator: a “\$172,000 per year associate vice provost had been hired to oversee the work of committees charged with considering a change in the academic calendar” who defended their role to a Bloomberg reporter by stating “[my] job is to make sure these seven or eight committees are aware of what’s going on in the other committees.” Consider a recent state audit of the University of California system that revealed the Office of the President had “amassed substantial reserve funds, used misleading budgeting practices, provided its employees with generous salaries and atypical benefits, and failed to satisfactorily justify its spending on system wide initiatives.” Between fiscal years 2012-13 and 2015-16, the Office of the President’s administrative spending increased by 28%, or \$80 million. And 10 executives in the office whose salaries were analyzed by the audit made a total of \$3.7 million in fiscal year 2014—\$700,000 more than the combined salaries of their highest-paid state employee counterparts.

These lavish spending habits are especially alarming at a time when tuition for private U.S. colleges has risen by 144% over the last 20 years—including a 212% growth for in-state public school tuition. In fact, over the last thirty years, the cost of college has increased at five times the rate of inflation. Even with this rising tuition, over 150 non-profit public and private four-year and two-year colleges have collapsed in the last ten years; in many cases helped by growing administrative cost burdens.

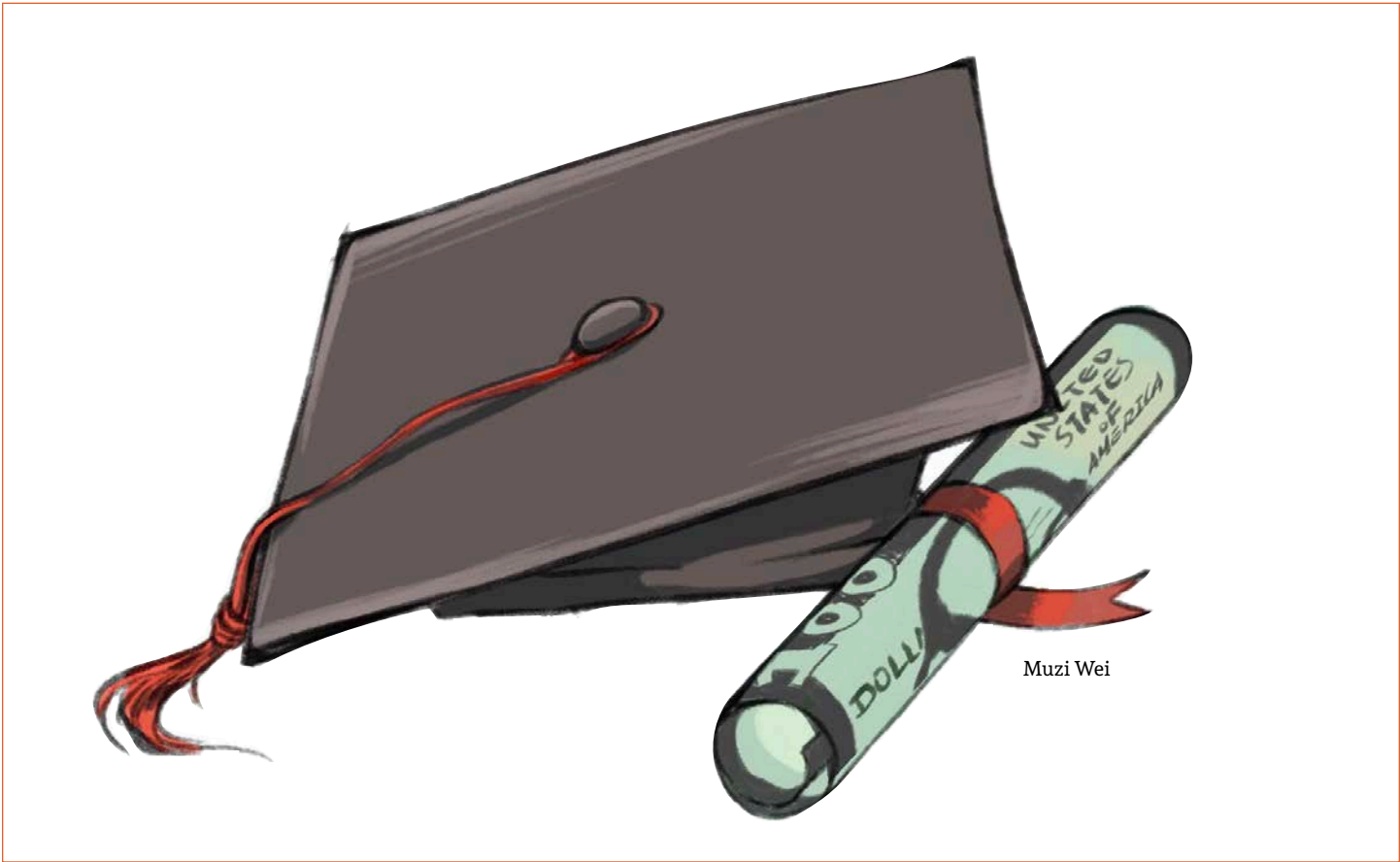
Given administrative spending generally accounts for a quarter or more of school’s annual spending, it makes sense that the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) found “increases in per-student spending on instruction, administration, and student services were each correlated with an increase in tuition for the next academic year, even after controlling for levels of appropriations and institutional characteristics.” Net prices also rose annually, suggesting student aid and discounting is not keeping pace with this tuition growth. That new “accessibility coordinator” might just be making your university less accessible to the average tuition-paying student.

As schools rapidly add high-paid administrators, they face the choice between decreasing funding elsewhere and raising tuition—and often do both. The percent of total university spending accounted for by instruction

“As schools rapidly add high-paid administrators, they face the choice between decreasing funding elsewhere and raising tuition—and often do both.”

has decreased from 41% to 29% since 1980, even as the portion of administrative spending has remained steady. According to Department of Education data, administrative positions at colleges and universities grew by 60 percent between 1993 and 2009, which Bloomberg

reported was 10 times the rate of growth of tenured faculty positions. Ginsberg reports from 1975 to 2005, the number of “administrators increased 85 percent, and the number of administrative staffers by a whopping 240 percent.” The scale and cost of college administrations are increasingly overshadowing the teaching faculty at the very core of higher education. A recent Department of Education study finds the proportion of spending on faculty has slightly decreased over time, with little to no increases in average salaries and an increasing reliance on part-time faculty. As the New York Times notes, while 45 years ago 78 percent of college and university professors were full time, today half of postsecondary faculty members are lower-paid part-time employees, meaning that the average salaries of the people who actually do the teaching in American higher education are



quite a bit lower than they were in 1970. In fact, universities are shrinking tenure opportunities and barely paying part-time adjunct professors to boost their bottom line. A report from the American Federation of Teachers found over 25 percent of adjunct faculty rely on public assistance and 40 percent struggle to cover basic cost, with nearly a third of those surveyed reporting making under \$25,000—the federal poverty line. While colleges gleefully add six-figure salary administrative roles—for instance the nine administrators serving on Harvard’s Task Force on Signage—their courses are increasingly being taught by part-time temporary faculty being paid starvation wages. It’s no wonder American universities are facing a wave of faculty strikes and labor demonstrations.

Fewer full-time faculty directly harms the quality of instruction received by students. Amid America’s largest urban housing crises, adjunct faculty increasingly are forced to work multiple jobs to cover living expenses, compromising their ability to focus on instruction. Taken together, American college students are increasingly being taught by inexperienced and overworked part-time staff who must juggle the de-

mands of often multiple classroom roles. This is simply not a recipe for academic success, nor is it necessary in a country with many universities charging students well over seventy thousand dollars per academic year. Instead of union-busting and cutting classroom instruction costs, universities should consider looking to huge administrative structures for savings. Ginsberg describes the problem as such:

“Every year, hosts of administrators and staffers are added to college and university payrolls, even as schools claim to be battling budget crises that are forcing them to reduce the size of their full-time faculties. As a result, universities are filled with armies of functionaries – vice presidents, associate vice presidents, assistant vice presidents, provosts, associate provosts, assistant provosts, dean, deanlets, deanlings, each commanding staffers and assistants – who, more and more, direct operations of every school. Backed by their administrative legions, university presidents and other senior administrators have been able, at most schools, to dispense with faculty involvement in campus management and, thereby reduce the faculty’s influence in university affairs.”

As Ginsberg points out, in addition to reduced funding, classroom instruction is also undermined by reduced faculty influence in university priorities. A former Harvard dean, Henry Rosovsky, once noted that the quality of a school is likely to be “negatively correlated with the unrestrained power of the administrator.”

Controlled by its faculty, a university is capable of excelling its role in educating and promoting the cutting edge of critical thought. As Stanley Aronowitz, a former Stanford academic on higher education, argues, the administrative university reduces its purpose to vocational training and producing competent labor to supply public and private sector needs. The administrative university provides a profoundly different student experience and advocates different values—potentially more utilitarian and less intellectual—than it would under the direction of faculty. I’m not advocating that America’s sprawling higher education system should be run by part-time faculty, rather that it is worth considering the profound distance that has been created between classroom and school leader-

ship. Investment in administrative growth is increasingly coming at the expense of academic priorities.

So what are these armies of administrators providing their universities? Extensive research by the non-partisan group the American Council of Trustees and Alumni found that both public and private institutions spending on administration has inconsequential correlations with graduation rates, particularly after controlling for external factors such as level of state appropriations. As universities decrease proportional instructional spending and divert money into administrators, of course graduation rates don’t rise. Administrative growth crowds out instructional funding and fails to improve graduation rates—all the while driving up net costs and limiting who can even attend universities.

It’s hard to say exactly how all these administrators are spending their days. As Todd Zywicki, a George Mason University law professor and co-author of “The Changing of the Guard: The Political Economy of Administrative Bloat in American Higher Education,” explains, “The interesting thing about the administrative bloat in higher education is, literally, no-



Alfonso Garcia

body knows who all these people are or what they're doing." The plethora of bureaucrats causing this administrative bloat seem to be made up of excessive administrators and unnecessary assistants with vague or purposeless job roles. David Graeber, a professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics, has argued that administrative staff are essentially "all these endless positions they're constantly making up...I got hired as a vice provost, so obviously I need four or five assistants...they decide what the assistants will actually do later."

A recent article in the Yale Review considered anecdotes of faculty experiences with University administration. Sterling Professor of Social and Natural Science, Nicholas Christakis, argued that any growth in the administration "can often come at the expense of advancing our primary mission, [and] is therefore mis-spent and inefficient." He further noted that sociological analysis suggests that "it is in the nature of bureaucracies to grow relentlessly, unless actively checked." Joel Rosenbaum, Professor Emeritus of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology at the Yale School of Medicine, said that the increased size of the administration adds significant red tape. Rosenbaum said that whenever a faculty member wants to alter a course or a department wants to hire a new professor, there is now much more administration "to fight your way through." Rosenbaum has been a faculty member at Yale since 1967. Oversized administrations consistently become burdensome to faculty research and instruction.

It is often claimed that government regulations have increased the need for administrators, which is certainly true to an extent—Title IX reporting and financial aid compliance are both important functions that necessitated administrative growth in the last couple decades. However, Paul Campos, a Professor of Law at the University of Colorado and an expert in the economics of higher education, argues that the burden imposed by government regulations is "overblown" and that it fails to adequately explain the significant growth in administrators. He has suggested that the main driver has been the desire of administrators to accumulate power and influence within their institu-

tions.

Many of these administrators occupy vague positions and serve primarily as liaisons between bureaucratic arms. "Health Promotion Specialist", "Student Success Manager," and "Senior Coordinator, Student Accountability" are all positions currently available on higheredjobs.com. A Harvard Crimson article considered the university's recent Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) "Task Force on Visual Culture and Signage", a 24 member-strong committee including 9 administrators. The team produced a 26 page report based on surveys, focus groups, and 15 meetings with over 500 people total. The recommendations ranged from "clarify institutional authority over FAS visual culture and signage" to "create a dynamic program of public art in the FAS." The recommendations ultimately led to the creation of a new, full-time administrative post, the FAS "campus curator" and a new committee, the "FAS Standing Committee on Visual Culture and Signage." Regardless of the project's potentially noble intentions of fostering inclusivity, this investment of remarkable time and expense only led to more administrators and a few vague recommendations. It is hard to imagine the FAS Task Force of Visual Culture and Signage having produced any tangible benefits to the educational experience of Harvard students.

As is the case in most industries, higher education administrations quickly reach a point of diminishing or negative returns. Once the foundational requirements of running a school are met—no easy task it should be noted—administrators risk becoming redundant at best, or burdensome and restrictive at worst. The proper amount of administration is highly subjective and of course varies by school, but these institutions' tremendous yearly growth reflect a new bureaucratic class in American universities. Recently published Penn State research finds the number of full-time administrators grew at nearly four times the rate of employees engaged in teaching, a 39.3% increase in administrative staff from 1993 to 2007. As the researchers explain, "It now takes 39.0 percent more full-time administrators to manage the same number of students than it did in 1993." At Harvard there are approximately 1.45 administrators for every academic

employee and 3.09 administrators when considering only faculty, combining for a total of 7,024 total full-time administrators in 2022—only slightly fewer than the undergraduate population.

This administrative growth reflects the culmination of a wide range of pressures on universities. Today's students demand unprecedented student services—mental health counseling, career advising, and more. Perhaps today's students, raised by video games and helicopter parents, are unable to function on their own like previous generations and require micromanaging administrators and hundred-person residential-life offices to engineer their social interactions. Either way, driven by intense—and often arbitrary—criteria used by higher education rankings, schools must scramble to implement these wide ranging and expensive services. As Ginsberg explains, an arms race to offer new and more comprehensive student services has led to a vast array of administrators and “other professionals’...[who] work for the administration and serve as its arms, legs, eyes, ears, and mouthpieces.” Title IX and other equity initiatives also have justifiably required more administrators. However, these developments only account for a fraction of administrative growth rates, which obviously have drastically outpaced student population and faculty growth. It's possible bureaucrats have taken new discretionary funds and hired more bureaucrats; elite schools have more money to spend these days thanks to increased federal subsidies and huge pools of domestic and international applicants willing to pay full price tuition.

American universities have also seen their cultural and political roles dramatically expand in recent decades. Education is by nature highly political in its content and impacts, but American schools have recently doubled their efforts to rectify historical injustices. Schools have nobly attempted to become forces of social consequence, leaving behind their pasts as instruments WASP social dominance to instead be forces of equity in American society. Increasingly diverse schools have also sought to increase their offerings to help acclimate underrepresented students. To do so, schools must build out extensive admissions, residential-life, community-outreach, and other

forms of administrative oversight.

In short, universities are being asked—or deciding—to dramatically expand in their scope. Administrative growth is a byproduct of universities taking on more and more responsibilities. The American university is redefining the role of higher education in students' lives and society alike. To balance these wide-ranging goals, schools should strive to build infrastructure that serves students while also keeping administrations lean enough to avoid interfering with academic affairs. This does not necessitate a radical overhaul of higher education, but rather a thinning of its administrative ranks and more intelligent expansion in response to future growth in student populations. Schools should evaluate whether they truly need that ninth housing cohesion coordinator and consider increasing funding to hire more faculty at higher wages.

To preserve the integrity of higher education in America, it is imperative we direct funding and bureaucratic authority back to classroom instruction. Leaner school administration promises more money for instruction and instructors alike. It returns control of academic matters to those closest to the learning process and eliminates unproductive bureaucratic hoops. Freeing funds from costly administrators could better serve goals of diversity and equity by increasing financial aid and decreasing class sizes. More underserved students could afford to attend higher education in America, and smaller class sizes and increased access to instructors would decrease the likelihood of students falling through the cracks. The funding being used to pay for dozens of administrative coordinators could potentially better serve students when applied more directly to areas of inequality. It is clear keeping university bureaucracy lean will be essential as schools continue to broaden their scope beyond the classroom. Managing administrative bloat is essential for the future success of American higher education. 🌐

D.C.'s Most Expensive Retirement Home: Congress

By Zak Asplin

The US electorate has some serious daddy issues. Scratch that, Granddaddy issues. The ever-rising age of our representatives isn't a fluke but rather the product of a gradual fossilization over the last century, eroding the hallmarks of robust representation and fundamentally threatening American democracy.

Age isn't always an issue — I have no doubt my grandfather would run rings around me academically — but, sometimes the sad truth of human mortality renders it problematic. The concern of old age in our politicians could be mitigated by a solution that would also have the added effect of putting to pasture the other burden in Congress: people who never leave. This solution? Term Limits.

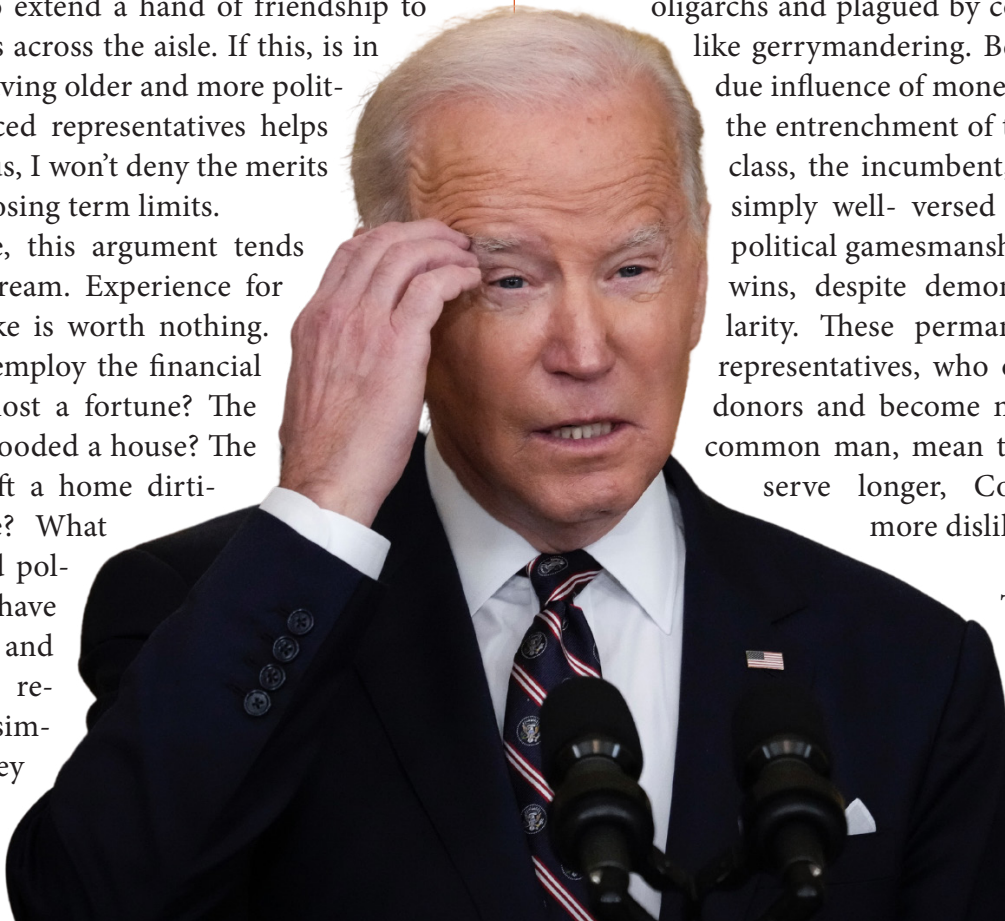
The founding fathers warned against career politicians, instead envisioning statesmanship in government like a national service. The role of a politician, then, should be a short-term employment, a commitment to recompensing the nation for its contribution to the individual — usually after or sandwiched between stints in the private sector. Dr. Ben Carson, former presidential candidate, stated on Meet the Press that “Our government was set up for citizen statesmen, not for career politicians.” But politicians like him are few and far between. Whether you loathe, love, like, or haven't the foggiest clue who he is and what he stands for, behind him are real, tangible achievements — truly a rare dinosaur in the Jurassic Park that is the US Capitol. He is a pioneer in the field of neurosurgery, responsible for the first separation of twins conjoined at the head and the first neurosurgical fetal surgery (and a Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient to boot). Politics came after he built the resume, after the real experience, after real results in the

real world.

While some would argue that the benefits of experienced career politicians far outweigh the costs, I must disagree. What are these benefits? I'll concede there is value in wisdom, knowledge, and experience. By its very nature, the legislative branch encourages gridlock, and sometimes pushing the sludge through the pipes requires the skill of people who understand how the game works. Indeed, representatives who have spent their life in Congress hold a web of friendships that often bridge the chasm between the parties. This knowledge comes in the form of congressional procedure, experienced campaigning skills, and understanding the language, form, donors, lobbyists, committees, parties, factions, interest groups, and more. Essentially, the political class. Defenders of the status quo point to the perks of having a senior established representative for their constituents as these members are more likely to hold better committee assignments and provide for their district by engaging in the destructive drug of pork barrel spending.

I wholeheartedly agree that wisdom is useful, and older representatives provide an invaluable font of knowledge that is constructive to good policy and conducive to public service. In a democracy, we should never seek towards the edges. I'm inspired by a speaker who visited our campus to spread some light on the Israel-Hamas conflict. Rabbi Bachman provided important insights into the conflict, but perhaps his most noble argument was his defense of the radical middle. Our leaders should not just be willing but striving for compromise. Compromise takes a rebuke of short-term self-interested thinking and a devotion to becoming the noblest statesman. When gazing upon Congress today, some of the youngest mem-

bers, wrapped up in ideological idealism, are the least productive. They embody the all-or-nothing mindset promulgated by the extremes of both sides in today's America. Ask yourself what that mindset forgets: the other 50% of the country that disagree. Many of these younger members of Congress who simply lack exposure to experience and wisdom, like Matt Gaetz, MTG, Ilhan Omar, and AOC, produce no policies and merely further divide. Democracies that forget to listen and love thy neighbor are short-lived and beneath us. I do not seek to deny that there are plenty of radical members of Congress whose age racks up. However, these members seem to be few and far between, and it makes sense that as we age, we become more amicable. As we return from Thanksgiving, we can see how the benefit of life experience allows us to work with people who differ politically and close the gap of partisanship. Families are smaller cells reflecting the makeup of this country — they disagree, they argue, but despite this, we try to work together. Perhaps the older you are, the more amiable you become, and, as such, the longer you spend in Congress, the more willing to extend a hand of friendship to fellow members across the aisle. If this, is in fact the case, having older and more politically experienced representatives helps democracy. Thus, I won't deny the merits of the case opposing term limits. But in practice, this argument tends to be a pipe dream. Experience for experience's sake is worth nothing. Would you re-employ the financial manager who lost a fortune? The plumber who flooded a house? The cleaner who left a home dirtier than before? What about the failed politicians who have lost, stolen, and abused their responsibilities simply because they have 'experience'?



What is political experience worth when most people aren't all that happy with the State of our Union? One would think expertise in other forms of employment, more reflective of the 330 million plus Americans who don't list 'politician' in their tax forms, might be worth more.

As of July 2023, Congressional approval rating stood at 19%. For the American public, Congress is more irritating than eczema. In January, it took an unprecedented 15 rounds of voting to choose a Speaker of the House. As of today, Senator Tuberville, one man, is holding up over 300 critical military appointments and leaving 3 US military branches without Senate-confirmed heads. Meanwhile, the Congressional Research Centre has found that reelection rates hover 'between 95 and 100%' and since the beginning of Congress, 'The average representative tenure has nearly quadrupled.' Those who posit that the high incumbency rate suggests public support for career politicians, place overwhelming faith in so-called American democracy, bought and paid for by billionaire oligarchs and plagued by corrosive practices like gerrymandering. Because of the undue influence of money in elections and the entrenchment of the political overclass, the incumbent, usually older or simply well-versed in Machiavellian political gamesmanship, almost always wins, despite demonstrable unpopularity. These permanent Washington representatives, who only defend their donors and become more aloof to the common man, mean that as politicians serve longer, Congress becomes more dislikable.

The argument that political experience confers superior knowledge is similarly dubious. Basic common sense


assumes that your representative must have as much knowledge of what affects you as possible, to properly represent your interests. With every additional year spent in government, politicians seem to be losing touch at an alarming rate, simply because they don't live like you do. 52% of Congress are millionaires compared to 5% of the American public. Secured salaries and lunches with lobbyists are a necessary part of the job, but how long until that changes someone? One example is that of Representative Maxine Waters, from California's 43rd district. Well, in truth, she's not actually from there; instead, Representative Waters' \$6 million mansion lies in California's 37th district. As Water's enjoys her castle on the hill, 1 in 5 people living in her district are below the poverty line, and 1 in 3 children live in poverty. At 85, she is currently serving her 17th term in the House of Representatives. How fit is she to serve?

Moreover, the issues affecting Boomers and Generations X, Y, and Z are all different. The desires of younger people — facing a future more uncertain than most of our predecessors — ought to be reflected, or at the very least heard. But when the Senate's median age is 65.3, and the House's median age is 57.9, Congress hardly represents a country whose median age is 38.1. This leaves far too much room for key issues important to younger voters to fall through the cracks.

Now, we must approach the most important truth, a controversial one: some people are just too old. There's something depressingly humorous in watching Joe Biden fall off a static bike, Mitch McConnell model for Madame Tussauds and Dianne Feinstein forget how to vote. But we can no longer ignore how deeply troubling it is. The sitting president of the United States is 80. Ask yourself, would you be happy letting your 80-year-old Grandfather run the world's most powerful economy, military, and nuclear arsenal? The president randomly shakes hands with the air, naps at COP 26, falls over not once, not twice, but thrice on the Air Force 1 steps, tumbles at the Air Force Graduation, shouts "God Save the Queen" a year after her death at a gun control event in Connecticut, and exclaims that "America can be summed up in one single word: 'ashssffurrddtifosncascation.' I hate to break

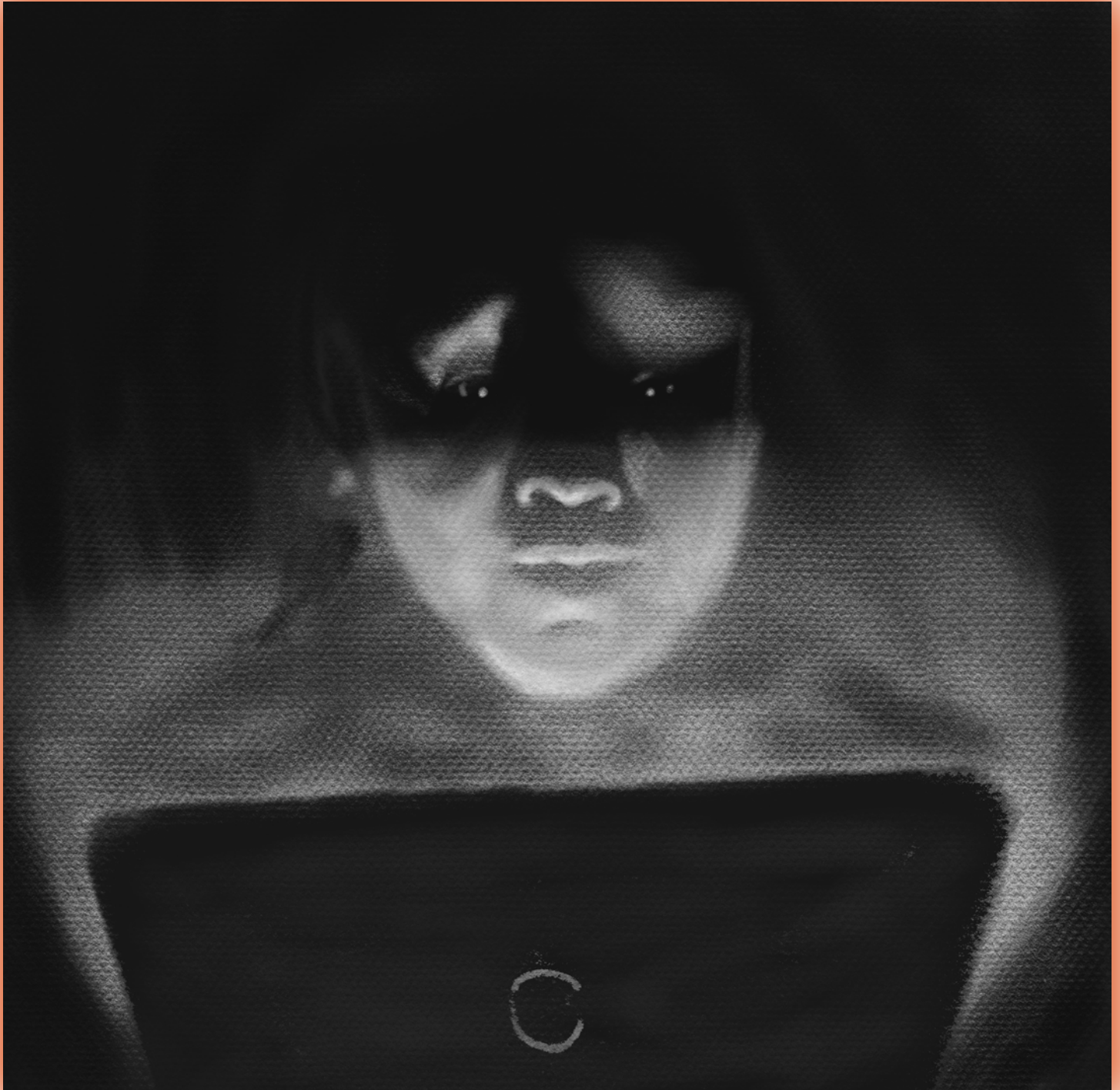
it to those in his party who claim that Biden is mentally cognitive, but that ship has sailed, wrecked, and sunk to the bottom of the ocean. This presents serious national security concerns. Unfortunately, the world has its fair share of despot dictators and strongmen who respond to strength or intelligence, and Biden, simply isn't the picture of strength or intelligence. Might Putin have been more cautious if the president weren't senile, or the Taliban in Afghanistan, or China and North Korea? Leaders and academics have argued such, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and international relations specialist Kevin Roberts.

I do not object to the elderly being in office; they can bring valuable life experience to leadership and policy. However, it is when they begin to lose their faculties — something clearly evident in some of our politicians — that I pause. I also object to the permanent-class of long-term career politicians in D.C. Introducing term limits to Congress would flush out the latter and heavily protect against the former, for should someone new to politics be elected in their seventh decade, they remain limited in how long they can serve.

As Nancy Pelosi announced her intent to seek reelection at 83 years old, with 36 years in Congress, we ought to remind our representatives that sometimes, the most noble thing to do and the best way to serve their country, is to step down. Should they refuse to listen, we drag them off by the scruff, in the form of clear, constitutionally amended term limits. 

Finding a Middle Ground in Online Transparency

By Andrew Jorge



Alfonso Garcia

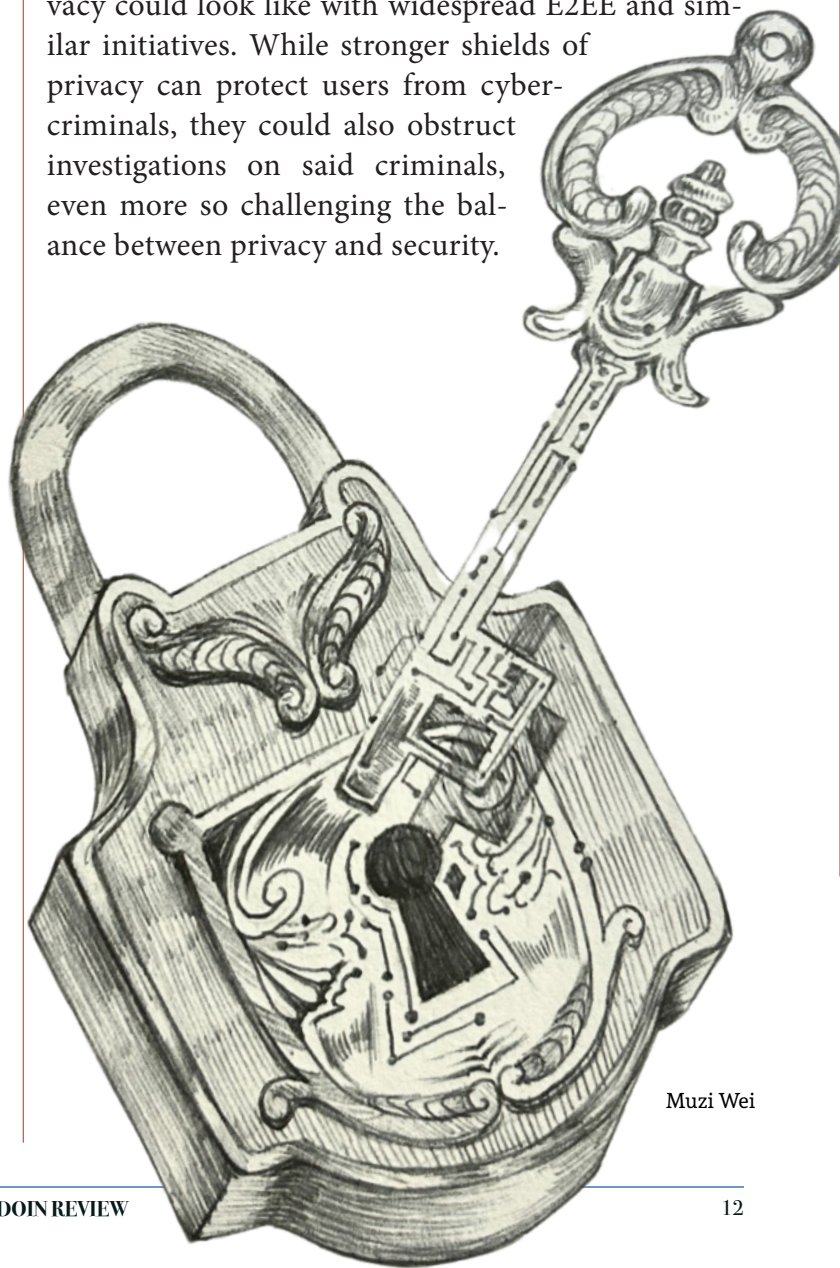
Curiosity is human instinct. It is in our nature to be curious about what our friends and family are doing, who the person next to you in the library is texting long paragraphs to, what the people in your class are whispering about, and what grades they got on their last midterm. Of course, these are instances where it wouldn't hurt to mind your business. But what if you end up overhearing a crime in the making? If being inquisitive can protect us from harm, then when does it truly become 'none of our business'?

Shifting our focus from individual curiosity to national security, we encounter similar dilemmas on a much larger scale. In the United States, we've seen security measures diminish the privacy of those who choose to fly by air. While being a somewhat minimal encroachment, it portrays a reestablishment of values; we can attribute this to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which is an unfortunate case of a lack of security; al-Qaeda used a cryptic communication system while the U.S. intelligence held fragmented data which if shared effectively across agencies, might have preempted the tragedy. This dilemma is a reality that lawmakers must often face. When it comes to granting the public a reasonable amount of privacy, they must act according to an appropriate level of authority. Implementing a strongly encrypted online atmosphere, particularly through encryption, ensures that personal data is securely shielded from unauthorized external access. Not only does this establish a clear boundary between government and public privacy, but it has the added benefit of significantly protecting against cyber attackers.

Reflecting the trend towards prioritizing user privacy in the digital realm, Meta has established end-to-end encryption (E2EE) on most of their platforms this year. This form of encryption guarantees that the message's contents can only be accessed by the sender and the intended recipient. This means that neither the messaging service provider nor anyone else, even a government official, can view the message's content while it's in transit or at rest. Meta intends to continue implementing E2EE on all of its platforms, marking a significant step in the direction of user privacy. However, this raises concerns about the potential drawbacks of excessive privacy, such as hindering legiti-

mate law enforcement efforts and possibly shielding nefarious acts from necessary investigation.

Many argue in favor of the implementation of E2EE as a way to secure their online data from malicious hackers. An instance that has grounds for fueling this desire would be when Facebook faced a huge security breach in September 2018. Nearly 50 million users had their confidential information exposed to attackers that exploited several bugs in Facebook's code. "The flaw allowed the attackers to steal so-called access tokens — digital keys that allow access to an [Facebook] account," according to a New York Times article. The identity and intentions of these attackers have remained a mystery. In addition to this massive data leak, there have been seven other data breaches on Facebook alone, raising the question of what privacy could look like with widespread E2EE and similar initiatives. While stronger shields of privacy can protect users from cyber-criminals, they could also obstruct investigations on said criminals, even more so challenging the balance between privacy and security.



Muzi Wei



Alfonso Garcia

These recent initiatives on Meta's platforms have come after a political battle in the United Kingdom. A few years ago, then-Home Secretary Priti Patel pushed for Meta to provide law enforcement and other government officials access to encrypted messages sent on its platforms, arguing that this was necessary for identifying criminals and potential crime. She explains in an article with *The Daily Telegraph*, "A great many child predators use social media platforms such as Facebook to discover, target, and sexually abuse children. These protections need to be in place before end-to-end encryption is rolled out around the world."

I'd also like to acknowledge legitimate arguments to be made about maximizing user privacy. Two years prior to the Facebook breach, there was a dispute between Apple and the FBI over the company's use of encryption. Following the San Bernardino terrorist

attack, the FBI asked Apple to create a software tool to unlock an iPhone 5C used by one of the shooters. Apple resisted, asserting that such a tool could compromise the security of all iPhones, thus threatening user privacy. While the FBI viewed their request as a matter of national security, Apple saw it as a potential privacy invasion with broad implications. Ultimately, the FBI withdrew its request after accessing the iPhone data without Apple's assistance. From my perspective, the standoff between Apple and the FBI highlights a complex intersection of privacy, security, and ethical considerations in the digital age. While there is an obvious need for national security, there is still a potential for privacy invasion that cannot be overlooked.

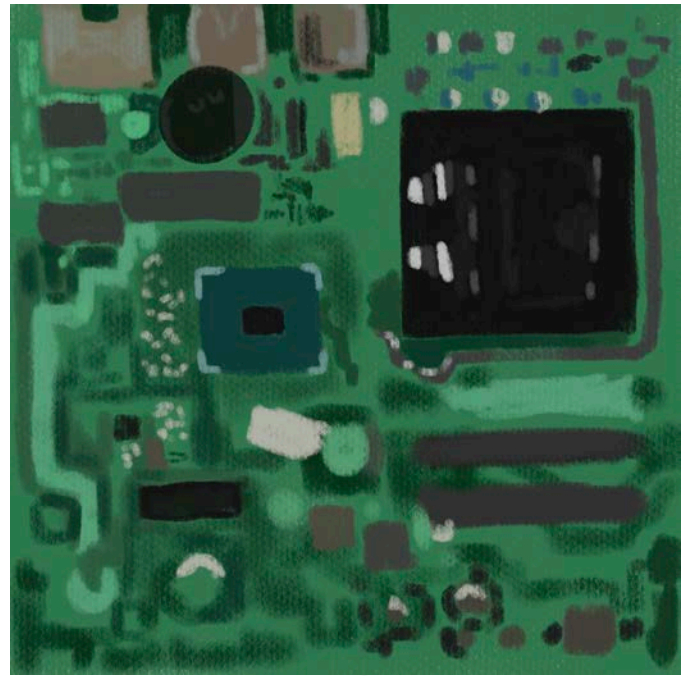
Apple CEO Tim Cook embodies this perspective in a public letter following the request, describing the

government's demands as something "chilling". He described how, if the government permitted itself to unlock your iPhone, it would be capable of much more than just that. "The government could extend this breach of privacy and demand that Apple build surveillance software to intercept your messages, access your health records or financial data, track your location, or even access your phone's microphone or camera without your knowledge," he stated.

Having said that, while Apple advocates for security against government intrusion, their own data collection practices contradict this sentiment, highlighting a broader inconsistency in the tech industry's approach to privacy. From my perspective, this reflects a form of hypocrisy. Excessive privacy from government oversight, as some tech companies promote, can be problematic. It risks shifting power over personal data from elected authorities to corporations, challenging accountability and authority.

In considering the balance between privacy and security, it's helpful to conceptualize it through the lens of societal obligations. Just as a child grows up under the guidance of a parent, learning to navigate the balance between free expression and responsible behavior, so does a citizen in a society. Because every child is inherently dependent on their parents, that parent is responsible for attempting to shape their child into a functioning member of society. Many hierarchical relationships can be described through this paradigm, where some degree of compliance is required to reap the benefits of an authority.

Such an affinity between ranks of power is foundational to human connection on a personal scale and among a group of individuals. Government depends on a reciprocal relationship between the governed and the governing bodies. When we consider online surveillance in this context, it becomes a question of societal responsibility. If the public accepts security measures in physical spaces, like airports, for the common good, then why not have a similar approach to online spaces? The use of social media among younger users presents a case where monitored interactions could serve a protective purpose. However, this should not



Alfonso Garcia

champion unchecked surveillance. Just as a search warrant is required for physical searches, online monitoring should be governed by strict guidelines to prevent abuse.

In essence, my argument is not for an elaborate spying system, but for a balanced approach where the government's actions are transparent and accountable. As we navigate this issue intricately, it becomes clear that a balanced approach is essential, where we must lean toward confiding in the system that keeps our rights secure. Surveillance, whether online or offline, should be a carefully considered tool, used only when necessary and under strict regulations. It's about maintaining a relationship with the government that is responsible and effective, ensuring that both our security and our rights are upheld. 🌐

Artist Interview: Alfonso Garcia

By Austria Morehouse

Class of 2025 Visual Art & Computer Science double major, Alfonso Garcia, and I recently met to discuss the evolution of his body of work, and the influences currently directing his advancement as an artist. As a Bowdoin Review Illustrator, he is active artistically, exploring mediums of animation, illustration, drawing and design to showcase his work.

Alfonso's art portfolio is an amalgamation of fantastical spaces, glimpses of humanity as an essence, layered with motifs, rich in metaphor and symbolism. Stylistically, he leverages light and shadow in saturated monochrome compositions, constructing surreal, imagined spaces that encapsulate universal human impressions.

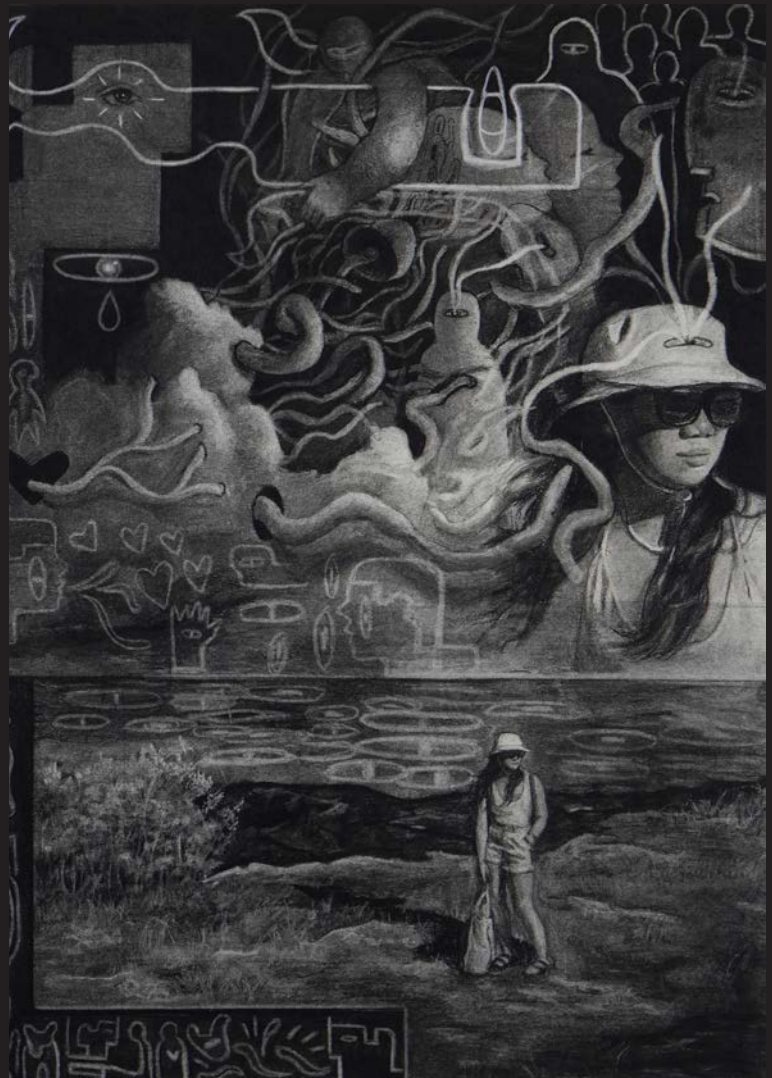
1. What motivates you to embrace surrealism as a creative instrument in the conceptualization of your works?

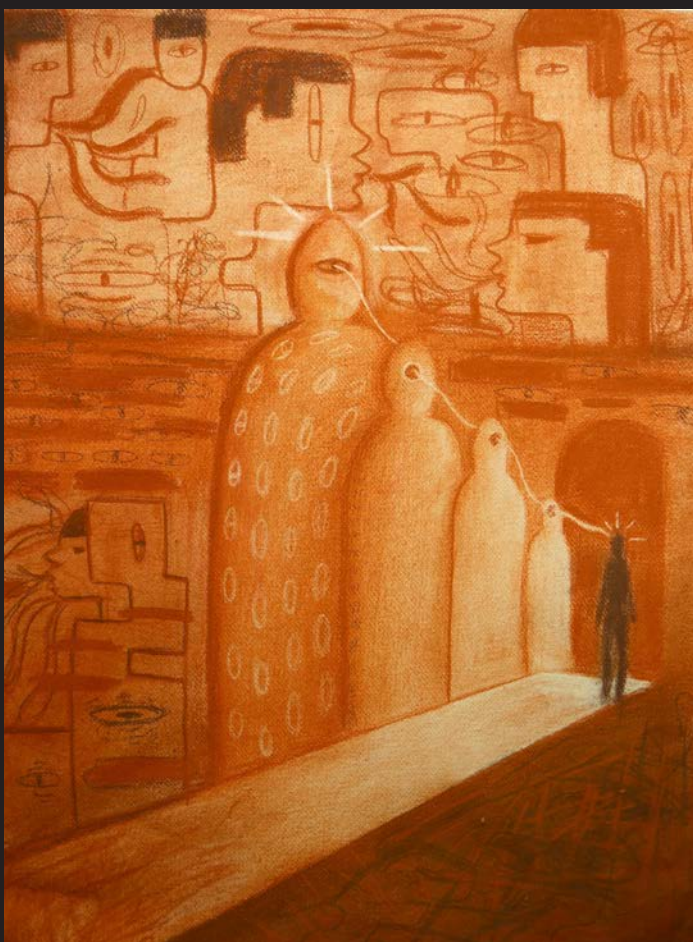
I am drawn to artwork that isn't grounded in reality, as it gives me the largest sense of freedom... That ability to roam in my mind translates well into my creative practice, because I have an endless stream of thoughts and emotions to use when I draw or paint. It helps make my process intuitive... While my art is definitely influenced by more movements than just Surrealism, Surrealism's roots in revealing the unconscious mind is something I can see in my work. I want viewers of my pieces to experience the freedom you get knowing you aren't bound to an experience that has to be realistic.

Alfonso's art radiates with an inescapable sense of vulnerability. We discussed the notion of an invisible string; the theme of boundless and incorporeal sentiments, passed through generations or versions of past

and future selves. The success of this theme relies on a collaboration of disjointed spaces with a sense of belonging and connectedness:

2. Visually, we enter enigmatic, figurative spaces that are fictitious in composition but seemingly universally identifiable. How intentional is your approach to building viewer connectivity and engagement?





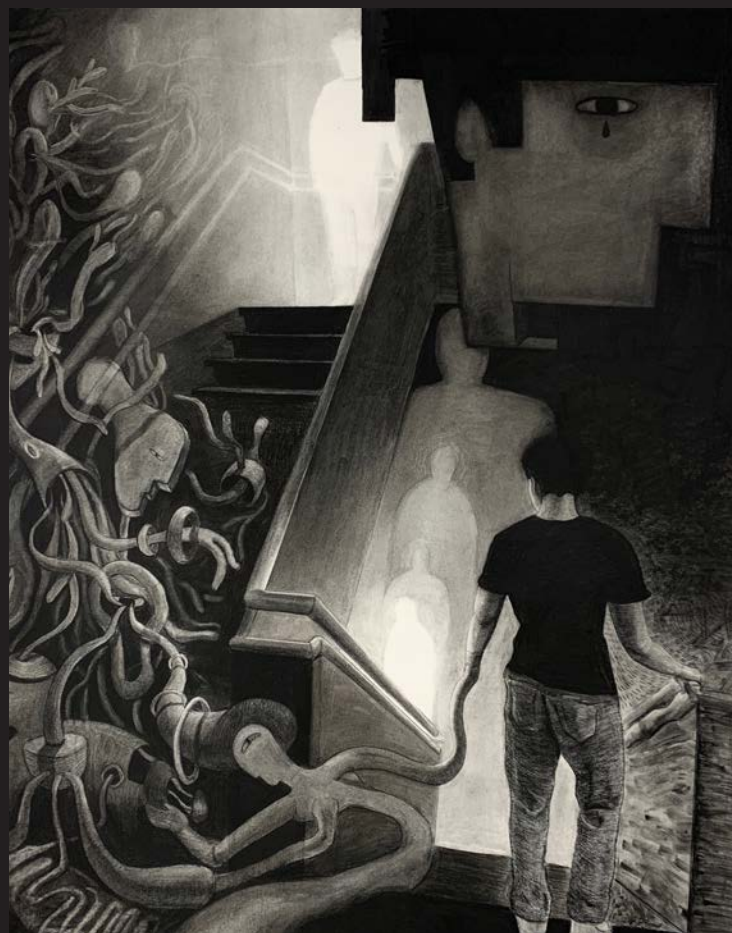
3. As you continue to delve into notions of personal and universal human identity in tandem with career readiness, how do you find yourself evolving as an artist? How do you foresee your goals might change the ways you leverage creativity in your future?

As a junior, life has gotten more real than ever. Throughout this semester I've been reflecting on what I've done during my time here and what I'm still left wanting to accomplish... Amidst this uncertainty of what I really want to do with my life, ironically, I've never felt more capable and confident in my craft. Last semester with my independent study, for the first time I truly explored where I could go with my art style. A Trillion Billions has only given me more belief that I really do have something to say as an artist and I don't want to stop. While I'm uncertain where I'll land, I do know that I want to continue my series and expand it beyond just 2D pieces of art on a wall.. After college, I think if I'm not committing to breaking into the art world, I'll be using my skills in a creative field. ©

I fluctuate between creating pieces that bridge our human world to the world that I'm creating and pieces that completely depart from the human world. These for me are the two endpoints on the spectrum of my style...

This past spring, I started my series A Trillion Billions, a body of work about discovering one's own power. For that, I was very intentional about how much I'd turn the dial of viewer connectivity in each piece... For me, the density of my pieces is what makes them exciting and perhaps overwhelming for others. I like it that way. With each glyph or tendril-like form I add to a piece, I add more symbolic depth at the expense of potentially alienating the viewer. Sometimes, that's just what you have to do.

We discussed your process of creativity being fueled by stages of introspection and expansion as an artist in personal and professional contexts.



Artist Interview:

Mei Bock

By Austria Morehouse

English major & Visual Arts minor, Mei Bock, Class of 2024, has spent plentiful time in Bowdoin's Robert H. and Blythe Bickel Edwards Center for Art and Dance, where I've been lucky enough to witness her artistic process firsthand. In recent conversations, we explored her driving forces as an artist, and her conscious choices of content and form.

Accomplished in designing life-sized portraits, Mei expressed her appreciation for 'distance' in art: stepping back and adopting a holistic perspective. Her artwork culminates at an intersection of mood and individuality, fusing cultural and gendered identities.

1. You have united technical skill with personal themes to generate a series of emotionally rich and formally advanced artworks, how does this content inform your stylistic choices of form and other visual elements in your compositions, including scale, space, shape and color?

...I like to work a little bit outside of my own physical scale; strange and fun things happen when the physicality of the painting becomes a little unwieldy, a little out of my control. In painting figures, scale is often the first thing I have to decide about any painting...For my recent 4' x 8' painting, I scaled the figure to life size/slightly above to create feelings of imposition, suspension, and embodiment...When working with the human figure on a smaller scale, I find that then there arises a host of other associations —iconography, myth—and the containment of the figure within a smaller scale locates it more so within story or memory. For the viewer, the smaller scale invites them to step in, and physically implode the distance from the art, to witness details that cannot be perceived from afar...

Mei is multi-faceted in her creative pursuits, balancing interests in poetry and writing with visual art.

She currently leads a Bowdoin poetry club, The Nightingale Society, and is working towards rebuilding the campus literary magazine, The Quill. We contrasted and paralleled the creative process involved in both writing and visual expression as art forms and the unique vulnerabilities inherent in both.

2. How does your dual role as a visual artist and poet complement your work in both realms? How has each artistic format influenced your practice and process?

Poetry and visual art feed into and bump up against each other in ways that have deepened my understanding of both mediums. In both, I learn how to better express myself and externalize my internal thinking. A lot of the pleasure of poetry for me comes from the moment

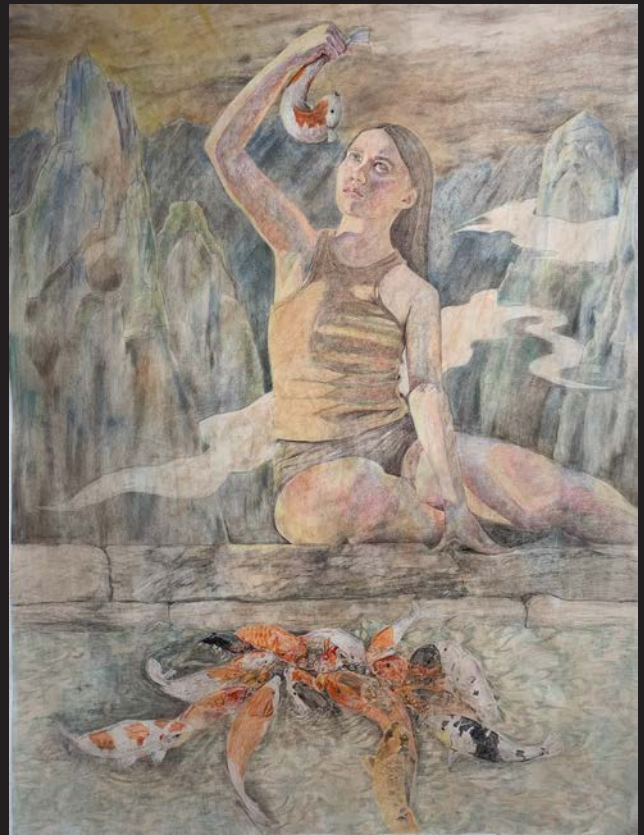


when I articulate something... Painting shares a similarity in that I strive to reach that moment where I feel I have externalized an image that I couldn't have dreamed of before. A lot of this comes through the process of layering: layering of ideas, moments, words in poetry, and visually layering elements in painting, to create a whole that is its own beyond the sum of its parts. My visual arts practice enhances my poetry in that it gives me an increased attunement to imagery and how the visual world dictates thinking. Conversely, writing poetry has helped strengthen my ability to deepen my thinking about the themes I explore in my visual art—race, desire, perception—which in turn gives me a firmer theoretical basis for my paintings.

Mei expressed themes of cultural and female identity, mythology, beauty and 'desire' as being thematically motivating, and as sources of her work's inspiration.

3. How do you measure the material and conceptual notion of 'beauty' in your finished works? What are your thoughts on beauty as interpreted by the viewer?

I am interested in the concept of beauty, especially with how it relates to depictions of women...in my piece "Descent of the Mucha Woman," ..I was thinking about the work of Bob Mass and Alphonse Mucha, and how I was



both drawn to their aesthetic beauty—swirling ornamentation, elaborate garb— while also slightly troubled by the ways the women, in all their beauty, seemed to be just another object in the project to construct something beautiful, rather than their own autonomous beings... Historically, depictions of Asian women emphasize their beauty as demure and passive. Thus, I want to forge a new approach to beauty—one that still maintains the aesthetic pleasure and balance of beauty—but also takes symbolic associations of beauty and complicates them. For example, I think about this a lot with hands. Traditionally, depictions of women's hands are beautiful and limp...I pose hands in the act of engagement —grabbing, holding, hanging on to, enveloping, pulling apart...I make other intentional choices to subvert and shift ideas of beauty: severing a subject's hair, being intentional about what parts of the figure are clothed or nude, creating facial expression that reflects the subject's internal thought. Through these choices, I seek to have my paintings create a new kind of beauty that dwells in embodiment, power, and strangeness. ©



Artist Interview: Lauren Russler

By Austria Morehouse

Lauren Russler, Class of 2026, is an Art History and Digital Computational Studies double major, an integral member of the Bowdoin sailing team, and a prolific artist. Her energy-infused artworks abbreviate large spaces with powerful delineation and prominent brushstrokes, highlighting her affinity and deep connectedness with her subject matter. Lauren's confidence in utilizing bold complementary colors and applying them to organic environments generates a sense of dynamic vitality and energy within her work, which is immediately immersive and engaging. Pushing the boundaries of abstraction, color remains a foundational compositional element of Lauren's art, dashing, variegated magnetic pigments unified whole.

1. Tell us about your approach to color, how this emerged and how it has changed over time.

My approach to color has evolved as I use color to highlight the differences in environment and mood within my compositions. I started using color to show the different rays and reflections I see in the water when I sail. I was interested in

how the sun reflected colors and subtleties that almost magically appeared on the water as I sailed along. The use of color increasingly became about the mood and attitude I want to showcase in my paintings and various artworks. I love color, and it is my expression of the spirit I see within things in the world; color has energy to me. I want my paintings to reflect the nuances and subtleties of the world through paint. I would like people to see different things up close as they are further away through my use of arrays of color from the paintings, drawings, and sculptures I create. I love the detail the shade provides. Rather than just a range of two tones of contrast, color provides another layer that leaves a range of possibilities in the paint that are not available with simply a grey scale. Using color is essential to what I want to say through my art and how I want to represent the world.

Training to perform in competitive racing at the January 2024 Olympic trials, Lauren is adept at balancing her sport, studies and her success in exhibition and art sales to collectors globally. Many of her artworks depict spirited ocean landscapes, sweeping renderings of passing sails on buoyant waters.





2. How does your personal connection to chosen subject matter influence your stylistic choices?

I create art from my life experiences growing up in Miami, being on the water sailing, and my interest in early 20th-century art history. I focus on subjects like femininity, wind, strength, and how colors represent energy. Sailing, Inspirational women figure, The physicality of the medium is essential to my practice. I create paintings, sculptures, and drawings using brushstrokes and visible

mark-making to showcase the vibrancy I want to encapsulate in my art.

Lauren's enthusiasm in the studio is contagious, her creative processes include a focused layering of paints, in thick, unapologetic application, driven by a vital physicality, painting with wide, sweeping strokes. Her course is rhythmic and intuition-based.

3. How does your physical dexterity affect your approach to art-making, and to what extent does it enhance and impact your finished works?

My physical approach to art-making lends to the energy I want to capture in my artworks. I want to illustrate the invisible power in all things through my paintings, drawings, and sculptures. The process contributes to how the composition is finally made. Through my practice, I aim to show how things and places exist physically, and in order to represent this, I utilize the same physicality to construct the ridges and different fragments of light and wind that flow over the landscapes and figures in my art. ©



Free Will, Faith, and a Journey to India

By Sunny Das

Here's a question for you: can you point to anything in your life, any singular thing you've done or accomplished, that is your own doing? The question, though at first glance a bit bizarre, stems from a stream of questions I have asked and continue to ask myself. The first of this stream is as follows: which of my actions, if any, can be separated from the rules of cause and effect, the principles of causality that underlie the physics of the universe? The second of these questions mirrors the first, though it is not quite the same: are my genetic code (nature) and upbringing (nurture) the only two influences of my character? The third question, the core question, the question that philosophers have asked for centuries and will ask for centuries to come, is a natural result of the first two: do I, do you, do any of us actually have control over our actions and ourselves? In other words, do I, do you, do any of us, have free will?

When I was 15, the full force of these questions hit me. The more I thought about them, the more my rationalistic mind struggled to come up with a good answer. It seemed everywhere I turned, the truth was simply there, ringing with cold clarity: your freedom is an illusion. Your identity is an illusion. Your life is an illusion. To solve such existential doubts, many turn to the comfort of religion. However, as a stubborn atheist who favored science and rationality over the written word of the Bible, I always felt that religion could not reveal the truths of mankind – that, in fact, religion prohibits those truths from revealing themselves. At 15, I couldn't imagine how someone could have faith in a God that has no proof of existence. By extension, I didn't understand how someone could have faith at all – an act that, by definition, requires one to believe in something they have no tangible reason to believe in. When, at 17, I began to explore dharmic traditions, I was constantly ask-

ing this question. As it turns out, so were the founders of said traditions. Within the folds of Hinduism, which encompasses six different schools of thought, hundreds of deities, and multitudes of offshooting philosophies, the debate over free will and faith has raged on since the beginning of time. Or, at the very least, since the beginning of the Bhagavad Gita.

Free Will in the Bhagavad Gita

My father once described the Bhagavad Gita to me as “The Hindu Bible.” While an oversimplification, this comparison can be helpful when thinking about its influence in Hinduism. The Gita is a part of the Hindu epic called The Mahabharata, the longest epic poem known to man. Its pages are filled with discussions between Prince Arjuna and his charioteer, Lord Krishna, who gives him advice on how to act in the Kurukshetra War. The text serves as a book of moral guidelines for not only Arjuna, but also for its readers.

Two concepts central to the Gita's teachings are the Atma and the Brahman. The Atma is, simply speaking, the ‘Self’ or the soul, while the Brahman is the universe as a whole. Among the different schools of Hinduism, there are a variety of interpretations that attempt to describe the relationship between the two. One interpretation is the phrase Ayam Ātmā Brahma. Its meaning is deceptively simple: The Atman is the Brahman. This ultimate unity between the self and the universe is only reachable through intense meditation. It leads to moksha — liberation from the cycles of rebirth. One of the Gita's ultimate goals is to show us how we can achieve moksha. To do this, it must address the concept of free will. To understand this, one must read the Gita with rigorous concentration and dissect its teachings through sincere dialectic conversation. And that's just what my father did.

In a stark contrast to my own childhood, my father grew up in a small silk village, Sualkuchi, nestled in the heart of Assam. He was born into a family with eight siblings, all squished together in one room. By day he was a mischievous student, flicking pencil lead onto the back of the girls in his classes and stealing fish in the market. By night, he was a philosopher, reading the Bhagavad Gita under the soft candlelight of his ancestral home, fervently debating over its hidden meaning with his father, Krishna Ram Das; the local tantric healer, Jagat Ghora; and the renowned Vedic scholars, Dayal Krishna Bora and Hem Bhai Bhaap. Their conversations raged through the night, their inexorable passion taking flight. Yet, though they recorded bits and pieces of what they talked about, they left much of it buried in their memories, forming rust and collecting dust. So when I decided to travel to India for five months during my gap year before college, I did what any curious 18-year-old would do: I blew off the dust, scraped off the rust, and tried to get to the bottom of what, exactly, they had discussed.

Four decades after my father and my grandfather sat debating the Gita in their ancestral Sualkuchian home with a tantric healer and Vedic scholar by their side, a lot had changed in the small Indian village. For one, my grandfather had long since passed away, seized by esophageal cancer. His nine children had grown up, married, and had children of their own. The one-story house had turned into a three-story building, the candlelight into a light bulb. And there I was, as I was perhaps always determined to be, reading the Bhagavad Gita under the flickering luminescence of my ancestral home, fervently discussing its hidden meaning with my father, Bikul Das; the local Kamakhya-temple devotee, Pranjal Das; and a philosophy student, Rupam Das.

Through our conversations together, we struggled to come to one definition of 'free will.' I also struggled to understand 'free will' in the context of what my father talked about with Dayal Krishna Bora and Jagat Ghora. Confusion was the norm, misunderstandings arose at the slightest shift in perspective, and yet, we continued to search for the right vocabulary, so that we could properly explain these abstract concepts with clarity. In the end, our conversations illuminated a possible conclusion – a dim ray of light in the face of a heavily clouded problem. It lacked the certainty of enlightenment, it lacked the brightness of the Brahmanic energy, it lacked the clarity of moksha. Instead, it added an-

other interpretation, one of thousands, to the interpersonal, intergenerational, and international conversation regarding free will.

The Gita does not give one clear-cut answer to the question of free will, but rather prompts the reader to consider 'freedom' from a variety of angles. On the one hand, it states "All activities are carried out by the three modes of material nature. But in ignorance, the Atma, deluded by false identification with the body, thinks of itself as the doer" (Bhagavad Gita 3.27). In this clear demarcation of



free will, the Gita suggests determinism. The three modes of material nature, or the three 'gunas,' control us, not the Atma. Yet, in a seemingly contradictory phrase, the Gita writes, "the Atma can control the wandering mind through self-restraint" (6.26) which suggests that the Atma can exert free will, because it can exert control. The Gita resolves this question, proclaiming that "By transcending the three modes of material nature associated with the body, one becomes free from birth, death, old age, and misery, and attains immortality" (14.20). According to our interpretation, if all activities are carried out by the three modes of material nature, implying determinism, a person only obtains free will once they transcend these modes. This logic applies to non-Hindus as well. As I see it, the Hindus simply relabel 'determinism' as 'karma,' 'liberation' as 'moksha,' and 'causes of being' as 'modes of nature.' Regardless of the vocabulary used, the principle is clear: free will exists only upon the attainment of moksha. However, few are able to achieve moksha within the span of their lives – it requires heavy meditation and practice. For the rest of us, then, how are we to live in a state devoid of free will? Jiva Upkara Tantra

provides an answer.

Free Will in Jiva Upakara Tantra

The bells of Kamakhya Mandir ring through the still air as Pranjal leads a group of us around the temple's center, muttering a mantra under his breath as we complete eleven circles. Our bare feet hit the floor, our hands hold baskets full of petals and sticks, and our eyes look around to the people milling about in silk chador mekhas and dhotis, each muttering their own mantras, holding their own baskets, bare feet hitting the same floor. "There is a different energy at Kamakhya Mandir. Trust me, just trust me. You will feel it," Pranjal tells me. I search for the energy, but I can not manifest it. I am no Kamakhya devotee, I am no Hindu, I am no believer. I am agnostic. The eleven circles are just circles, the baskets just tools, the mantras just sounds. Yet after our ritual walk, Pranjal was satisfied. "I told you," he said calmly. "Kamakhya is here. She will protect you, as she is protecting me." Still, because of my lack of belief in tantra, the primary system of worship at Kamakhya, and my lack of connection with the mantras, the sacred mutterings of the tantra, I could not feel as protected as he. And maybe as a consequence, I was not.

There are many different types of tantra, as 'tantra' is simply a system of worship. My grandfather was particularly interested in Jiva Upakara Tantra. "Jiva" means life, while "Upakara" means altruism. It makes sense then, that the central goal of the tantra is to restore life through altruistic acts. Jiva Upakara Tantra is an orally transmitted confluence of dharmic thought; it is both a medical practice and a philosophy. Its metaphysical foundation lies in the idea of the "Avatar Kosha," a latent sheath of our body-mind complex. The Avatar Kohsa arises in times of stress for both the individual and the society, restoring their intrinsic balance. It disappears after its job is done, selflessly performing the altruistic act, just as the name of the tantra implies.

How does Jiva Upkara Tantra relate to free will? According to almost every sect of Hinduism, it is primarily through meditation, yoga, and contemplation that one can transcend the material world and obtain free will. Jiva Upkara Tantra is no different, yet it is unique in how it imagines the process of this transcendence: as a scale. The scale is as follows:

Dhriti (determination)
Iccha-shakti (willpower)
Moksha (liberation)

In this scale, determination leads to willpower, which leads to moksha. To jump from one stage to the next requires communal contemplation and meditation. In a process called Vidhata Manthan, a tantric healer leads a group of people through certain rituals and mantras meant to connect them all through their vidhata (communal energy). The community members start out with determination. As their determination strengthens through continued practice and mantra recitation, it becomes iccha-shakti (willpower). A few sages will attain free will through their liberation, moksha, after continued practice. It is important to note that willpower is distinct from free will. Willpower drives someone into action. Free will is the ultimate agency to choose which action to take. In Jiva Upakara Tantra, free will must be cultivated through willpower – it is not the baseline. Using the tantric rituals, however, it can, theoretically be obtained.

Paired with Hindu textual evidence, this train of thought makes sense. The cultivation of determination and willpower as a combination of stepping stones that lead to free will is an effective model for how to live; there are immediate benefits to embarking on this journey, despite the possibility you might never actually reach a state of free will. Regardless, Jiva Upakara Tantra urges us to strive towards free will, though we live in a world where it is not given to us as a birthright. Still, I must ask, as I always do: how can we earnestly climb this ladder, authentically cultivate our willpower, and willfully chant mantras, when we know that we do not have a choice over whether or not we do these actions in the first place? As it turns out, it took a chance encounter with an eccentric professor from Maharashtra to explain the only answer that ever satisfied my existential doubts.

Faith instead of Free Will

Standing in a silk chador mekhela at an IIT-Guwahati academic conference, I greeted a short man with a balding head and inquisitive smirk. I was in front of a posterboard riddled with technical terms I did not wholly understand, yet was trying my best to explain their meaning to him. However, because of my American accent, the man could

not understand me. Instead of trying harder to communicate, he slid his gaze to my cousin next to me, and proceeded to offer his critique of the vocabulary I used. A weird man, I thought. An hour later, I stood on a podium, eyes fixed on his balding head. I realized, now, who he was: a professor, and an important one. Standing before him, I recited technical terms I did understand. I explained Jiva Upakara Tantra and its implications in science to the best of my abilities. I did well, or well enough, excusing a few shakes in the voice and nervous stumbles over words. Upon completion, the professor approached me. He had a cup of tea in his hand, and he invited me to have some too.

“You gave quite an impressive presentation.”

Well, this was interesting. Considering his earlier rather offensive decision to not speak with me but rather with my cousin, his criticism of my word choice, and his know-it-all smirk, I had not thought he would be one to offer a compliment. Yet he did, and with an open smile, he began to tell me of his background. A psychotherapist with a background in genetics research and a scholar from Maharashtra, the professor now ran his own program of distributing cows to the local people in his village. He opened up, and with it came a stream of knowledge on tantra, Hinduism, religion, people, therapy, life.

“Tantra is a highly secretive practice, but it is not black magic. I respect tantrics, because they live a devoted life. Actually, everyone is a tantric, even if they do not know it,” he asserted with a firm nod of his head.

I argued back. I certainly am no tantric. I do not believe in anything – everything can be questioned, nothing, absolutely nothing, is certain.

Once again, he disagreed, insisting, “Everyone is a tantric at heart, and if they are not, they must become one. The principle of the tantrics is devotion, bhakti. Bhakti to a deity, Bhakti to their rituals, Bhakti to a belief. Without such a Bhakti, we are lost, we are aimless, we know nothing but pain. I am a Vaishnavite, so my Bhakti is to Vishnu. Your Bhakti might be to Shiva, or Lakshmi, or Jesus, or the earth. Everyone has a different bhakti. The tantrics have theirs. Those who do not have devotion, they suffer endlessly. In a way, they are the ones who are blind, though they think they can see. Trust me, I’ve seen it in my patients over and

over. It’s the truth.”

This thought troubled me, just as it always had. In a world of uncertainty, of chaos, of harm, where free will either does not exist, or is extremely hard to obtain, how can we commit ourselves to any one belief? When all thoughts and theories seem to crumple under the mere kiss of wind, when the faint touch of a dull knife is able to slice them open at any moment? In the face of determinism, how can we be determined to shape our mind and our life, if in the end, we truly have no control over the outcome at all?

The little man looked up into my eyes. “Those who do not have their own tantra, those who are not devoted to anything, they must find it.” And with that little remark left ringing in my mind louder than the bells of Kamakhya, our conversation ended.

Nestled in my ancestral home in Sualkuchi, Assam, I once again pored over notes from the discussions of my father, his father, and their philosopher friends. I learned of terms I had never heard before, of people long gone and thoughts long dead, yet reborn once again as I read through their hastily written yet detailed accounts. I sat connected in time and space to the voices of my ancestors, which my father had spent his life working so painstakingly to preserve. These voices emerged in science and in art, in festivals and in work, in temples, in prayer, in meditation, ultimately forming one grand song that I could neither ignore nor fear but was rather forced to hear, undoubtedly loud and unapologetically clear. Faith. Devotion. Bhakti.

Here’s the truth: I am devoted, though I often feel I am not. I am devoted to my family and to my friends. I am devoted to preserving their voices and songs. I am devoted to carrying their legacy forward, to living as though what I did mattered, because it does - to them, even if not to the universe at large. I am devoted to seeking the truth, even if it will only ever be true to me. Why I am devoted, I do not know. But maybe, just maybe, my devotion comes from something greater than myself. Maybe, if I could just let myself, I would realize, I do know how to believe in something greater than myself. Maybe, I came to see, maybe the professor was right. Maybe faith is the only force that can set you, me, them – all of us – finally free. ☺

From the US to France: How The Far Right Feasts On Their Scapegoats

By Dorian Maillot

Last August, I left France to embark on the American college journey. While I was saddened to depart my home country, I was more than glad to leave Marine Le Pen, Eric Zemmour, and their Neo-Nazi groupuscule acolytes wreaking havoc in an attempt to regain control of “the streets”. However, my bubble rapidly burst as I remembered that I was flying to the land of QAnon, the KKK and Donald Trump.

In the last decade, many capitalist democracies of the West have witnessed the rise of far-right parties in government elections. To cite only a few: Victor Orban took the helm of Hungary in 2010, Giorgia Meloni rose to the position of Prime Minister of Italy in 2022, and Wilders’ “Party for Freedom” won the most seats in the 2023 Netherlands General Election. The land of freedom recently experienced a four-year term presided over by the very democratic Donald Trump, and he also looks to be in the race for the next elections. France has seen the Rassemblement National’s (ex-National Front) Marine Le Pen obtain a record 41.45% votes in the second round of the 2022 French Presidential Elections. Meanwhile, her newly established competitor Eric Zemmour of the “Reconquest” party won a considerable 7.07% in the first round. The sum of both candidate’s votes reached an astounding 30% in the first round of the 2022 Presidential elections.

So what has permitted the far-right phenomenon to land in 21st-century America and France, the two great advocates of democracy? Evidently, the neoliberalist model of the last forty years has widened inequalities amongst the population with its trickle-down economics, creating frustrated people looking for a scapegoat. With the help of the media, the far right has then accelerated that social condition which turns people towards the far right, inciting hatred through false narratives and as Anne Applebaum, historian and author of *Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends* puts it, “different-sized lies.” They sow the seeds of dissent and then reap them with populist discourse. In both France and the USA, Le Pen, Zemmour, and Donald Trump feast on the increasing economic inequalities, the growing feeling of social insecurity, and a sense of “restorative nostalgia” for a time that never existed. While thousands of miles and the Atlantic Ocean separates the USA from France, the far-right entities follow the same recipe.

Rising inequalities and insecurities

The beginning of the political order named “neoliberalism” was marked by the rise of Ronald Reagan and Reaganomics in the 1970s. That era connoted the abandonment of welfare, financial deregulation, fiscal austerity, and privatization of capital. Neoliberalism and the free market have failed to keep many of their promises. Contrary to the common belief that absolute poverty by the

definitions of the UN has been reduced worldwide, a narrative which UN special rapporteur of extreme poverty Olivier De Schutter himself repudiates, social inequalities have increased. According to the PEW Research Center, in the USA the income share held by middle-class families has decreased from 32% in 1971 to 17% in 2018. The share held by lower classes has nearly halved, stooping down 7% to 3%. Inequality has not been this high since the Gilded Age of post-Civil War USA. Comparably, France's GINI coefficient of income inequality has stagnated since 1980.

In addition to worsening economic conditions, globalization, the prominence of identity politics, and the threat of terrorism have created a concoction for growing social insecurities. The easy scapegoat is foreigners: immigrants, refugees, and those who do not have the same physical characteristics. Armed with conflation and populism, the right spreads its ideology through an increasing presence in the media. In France, the three main channels of information, CNEWS, BFM TV, and RMC have had 18-36% of guests represent a far-right party. It is no coincidence that hate crimes are on the rise; they have increased by 20% in France between 2019 and 2023 according to France Info and by 25% in the USA between 2016 and 2020 according to the Department of Justice. A June 2020 report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies declared that "far-right terrorism has significantly outpaced terrorism from other types of perpetrators".

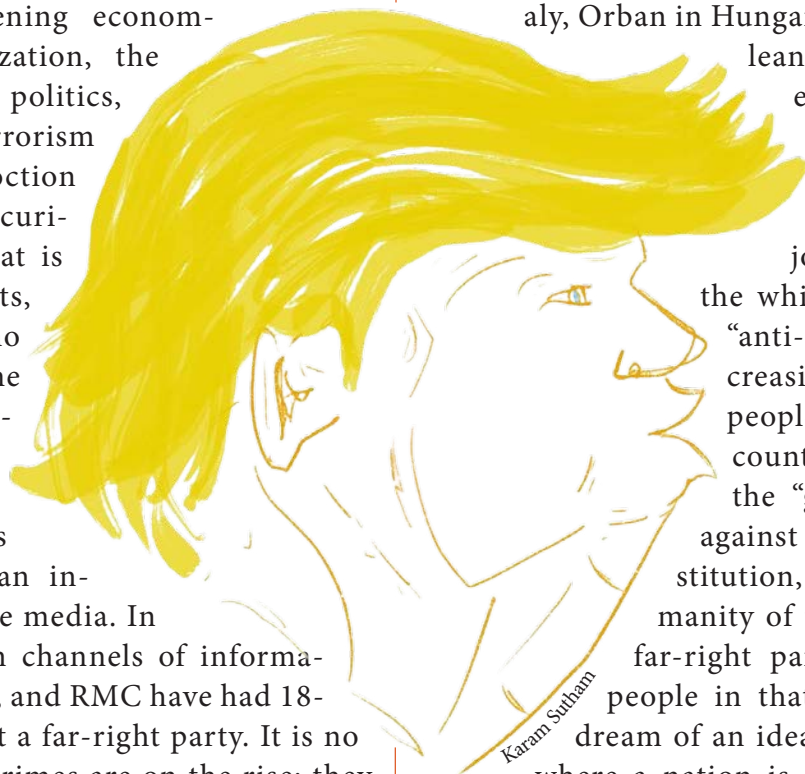
Conspiracies, populism, and the appeal of the far right

Those left behind by neoliberalism, who are most people other than those wealthy by inheritance or

benefactors of startup nations, are left with a political choice: trust traditional parties on the decline or turn towards the rising extremes. In their speeches and programs, the far-right fuels the anger of these people by propagating a fallacious scapegoat narrative. This narrative is everywhere, with the scapegoat often being an immigrant, a refugee, Muslim, or foreign. The best example illustrating the spread of such a false narrative is the Great Replacement conspiracy theory constructed by Renaud Camus in 2010, which Trump sympathizers, the Vox far-right party in Spain, Le Pen and Zemmour in France, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Orban in Hungary, and more far-right-

leaning individuals have endorsed since. This theory states that non-whites are coming in to take over the jobs and livelihoods of the white locals constructing "anti-white racism" and increasing resentment against people of color in Western countries. Camus warns of the "genocide orchestrated against whites through substitution, the crime against humanity of the 21st century". The far-right parties attempt to rally people in that common fear and a dream of an ideal utopia (or dystopia) where a nation is isolated by its border and people live by themselves in their communities, having expelled the scapegoats. In short, the far-right reminisce about a past that never existed. This is the philosophy of deception that the far right adopts, creating as Anne Applebaum describes "restorative nostalgia"; they want the "cartoon version of history".

That is what the far right does best: seducing the population through populist lies, adapting to current controversy, and targeting the opposition with demagogic as well as subversive comments. Deray McKesson, an ex-Bowdoin student turned



civil rights activist and author of “On the Other Side of Freedom: The Case For Hope” points out one of the false narratives of Trump: that “we [the USA] are the highest taxed nation in the world”. This claim has been refuted by the PEW Research Center which found that in fact, taxes in the USA are below the average of OECD countries. Trump’s statement confirms that his policies are aligned with the neoliberalist model of suppressing the welfare state and enforcing top-down redistribution which increases income inequality. This is the hypocrisy of the far-right discourse, which is also apparent in their politics on social matters. This past October, in France, the “Republican” rightist coalition of Macron’s Renaissance party and Les Republicains launched a march against anti-semitism. Controversially, the far-right nationalist party Rassemblement National of Marine Le Pen joined the march. An uninformed reader might ask: what is the problem? It could even be seen as a sign of progressiveness and a will to abandon racist stereotypes of the far-right. That is exactly the populist trap. Firstly, there is a historical paradox.

Jean Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen’s father, is a convicted holocaust denier. When he founded the National Front party, it was alongside ex-Nazi Waffen SS members Leon Gaultier and Pierre Bousquet. To this day, the Rassemblement National President Bardella refuses to admit that Jean Marie Le Pen is antisemitic. In any case, the Rassemblement National attended the march and successfully diabolized the leftist party La France Insoumise for refusing to walk along their side. Hence, they succeeded with their double discourse, appearing as a moderating force which promotes anti-racism while the Rassemblement

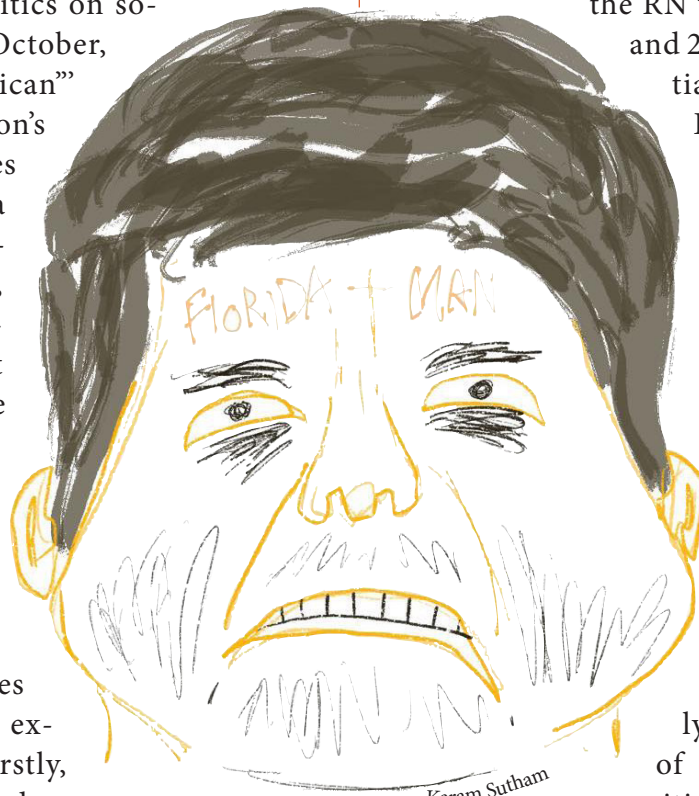
National rather uses it as a ploy to garner further populist support.

This strategy has worked. Focussing particularly on France, the Rassemblement National (RN) votes have steadily climbed during the last three presidential elections. They obtained 17.9% of votes in the first round of the 2012 Presidential elections and 2/577 seats in parliament. In 2017, this increased to 8 seats in parliament and 21.3% votes in the Presidential elections, allowing their candidate Le Pen to reach the 2nd round. In 2022

the RN won 89 parliamentary seats and 23% of votes in the Presidential election.

According to an ELABE study, 34% of those without a high school diploma and 27% of those without a college degree voted for Le Pen. According to Ipsos, 58% of those who earned less than the minimum wage voted for Le Pen in the 2nd round. However, only 17% of the under-24 youth voted for Le Pen in the first round. The demographics of the far-right electorate are blurry, seemingly composed of a majority of uneducated working-class citizens. The far-right exploits

the frustrated lower classes.



Political Implications

When one evaluates the four-year term of Donald Trump, the observations are stark. From an economic perspective, unemployment doubled due to his catastrophic management of the COVID-19 pandemic. From an international perspective, the trade deficit was increased due to the trade war with China, destroying 300,000 jobs and decreasing national investment by 0.3%. Trump followed the free market model of neoliberalism, and the

same faults of the neoliberalism economic model ensued, with the gap between America's highest and lowest income brackets increasing by 9% annually. According to data from the PEW Research Center, Trump left office with a 29% approval rating, the lowest after one term of the last five USA presidents. Even before the pandemic, which amplified the phenomenon of conspiracy theories about the origins of COVID-19 and the vaccine, 50% of Americans already thought that misinformation had become a problem. One cannot forget another notable landmark of Trump's term: his supporters' invasion of the Capitol.

Trump's scapegoats were principally Mexican immigrants. In 2015 he made one of many controversial statements: "They're [Mexico] sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems with us". The hate crime statistics against Hispanics reflected his demonisation of them, with Hispanics becoming victims of 70% more hate crimes in 2019 compared to 2016. Polls suggest that 56% of US adults thought Trump had worsened race relations and increased sectarianism in the country, once again feeding the far-right positive feedback loop.

Most importantly, it must be remembered that climate change remains one of the biggest challenges for humanity in the 21st century, and each presidential term of climate denial is playing a game of Russian roulette against the Devil himself. The far right does not recognise this. When Donald Trump calls climate change a "hoax" and rolls back 112 regulations to mitigate and adapt to climate change, he is engaging in roulette. Similarly, Marine Le Pen's party platform in 2022 was judged by the reputable public news source FranceInfo to be far off if not contrary to the 2015 Paris Accords. She likewise casually plays roulette.

When the far-right takes power, the government becomes autocratic and increasingly undemocratic. Hungary is a long-lasting far-right model whose policies could inspire future far-right governments in France and the USA. At the helm

since 2010, Orbán passed a law during the Coronavirus pandemic that allowed him to jail journalists critical of the government's management. The normalization of xenophobia which resonates with the reign of the far right can also be visible in Hungary. George Soros, a Hungarian and Jewish philanthropist billionaire has perhaps been the most representative victim of the far right's demonization of a scapegoat model. He once suggested that Europe should, from a humanitarian point of view, accept more Syrian refugees, and Viktor Orbán spent millions in a propaganda campaign to denounce Soros as the "instigator of a Jewish plot" to replace whites with Muslims, propaganda that was recuperated by QAnon in the USA later on. This is a strong example of the positive feedback loop which alimts the far-right electoral machine, maintaining scapegoats that serve as a symbol for the people's ills, in turn incentivizing them to vote for the party that promises to combat that scapegoat.

We cannot underestimate the rhetoric of the far right. The year 2024, marked by the US presidential and European Parliament elections, will be a pivotal year that could shape a new political order in capitalist democracies. Will the hateful populist discourse of the far right reach an eruption point in France and the USA, potentially leading to a conflict that leaves the ballots and takes place in the streets? What political order will be the successor to neoliberalism, and will the far right be the ones who oversee the transition? Is xenophobic authoritarian rule the successor to democracy? 🌐

abscess

by Rin Pastor

hey, lover / jesus of smoky sighs / grieving
wind / liquorice cigarettes / white skirts and
daddy's gun / do you still cut your face /
out of photos / every picture /
a shadow / of a shadow / of a boy with /
golden veins / shark bites in the morning /
coffee stains at night / both of us lost /
between window panes.

you were in the water this morning / goldenrod /
opheliac / dragonfish / driving with covers blown /
and lights off / stars watching like satellites / our
hearts never move / and ribs never break / we are
marlboro red and salmon-eyed / fool's gold /
all hearths made of oceans / all hearts made of dreams.

and baby / baby / baby / can you hear me / i miss your
teeth / tongue / snow-stained love / puppy eyes / where is your /
tableau / of / heartland winds / city smoke / blood /
ripe oranges / on the window / under my nails / between
my teeth / my aching teeth / fragmented / at the bottom
of the pool / we'll push against the water / and baby / baby /
did you know / that bodies float / because of love /
so much love / left unspent / in coronary absences /
and midsummer evulsions / because i know / i know /
all we are is breath / and body / and god / and body.



Nineteen

by Charlotte Iannone



Lauren Russler

Reality is unbending over my eyelids.
The tides tattoo my ankles
and I close my eyes on the highway
so they can take the wheel
from the tremors of my grasp
and carry me home.
My recklessness is a child I hold by the hand
and lead through the thinning aisles
of the grocery store.
In the parking lot, I brush her greasy hair
and tell her fables of martyrs
and witches and wives.
I am old enough for them to burn me for a crowd.
Would they believe the contorted truth of me
if I stood before the court,
the solar flare across my sweatshirt
throbbing like a heart?
I have walked the circumference of two moons
in thousands of shoes —
platformed, flat and wide, studded with silver.
They are now in the donate bin
at a closed-down thrift store
on the South Shore.
I could be the hyacinth girl, I tell myself, wet with rain.
I could be an iron dancer on a rusted weather vane.
No, name me Marigold
for the yellow-orange bloom
of my grandfather's hair.
Oh, sweet nineteen — let me go, let me go.
Let me be old.
Let me be an old woman already, one who coats
her white in teal and pink, in a little house
on a limestone cliff, the bluster combing her out,
spreading her wide, dashing her
along the whitecaps like hopscotch.
Her cottage leaning over the cliff
on Mermaid Lane, oyster shuckings
littering the yard
like spent shell casings, stout towers
of rounded rocks lining the dirt path, a rusty bike
laced with greens propped against a walnut tree.
Call me Marigold in this place.

Skeptical of September

by Sydney Pine

Carved into the calendar of my mind
and every sinew of my muscle
are the days of late September.

There exist the memories of him and marks
of tears cried in silence and minds gone astray
of newspapers he ordered in secret and soiled shoes
of spam calls and spring colds
of musty brown rugs and unplugged headphones
of grapefruit chapstick and fizzing ginger beer
of full moons and orange construction paper
of how life once was and can always become.

I wish I could lure the memories
from every fissure of my brain
draw them into the light
and leave them to decay,

but I know they are as much a part of me
as my own two hands
as is he
and I fear what I am
without them,
without him.

So I have tried to gather those memories close to me,
and remember the blue packs of American Spirit cigarettes
long walks in darkened woods
boxes of new computers and phones
rebooting the television in silence
and dancing cartoon clowns and cats in bright pastels,
I nurse them sweetly in the palms of my heart,
and make them feast at my table.

I've tried to make friends with the enemies of my mind,
to exist in the marrow of fractured bones,
and swim in the warmth of their infections
until I have exhausted myself to sickness,
a sickness that will lay my body and mind
to rest.



Karam Sutham

Waterwheel

by Dylan Beckett



Muzi Wei

The waterwheel
has seen fresh rain
and turns until
it quits the mill,

and joins the sunny stream,
the waters do not judge
its rusted nails and mold:
such joy in growing old!

The wheel has turned and now the leaves
have opened on their fiery show;
the world must move, those flame-drops fall
and tell the ground of coming snow.

My skin grows pale and shall be paper-like,
my leafless bones sing moldy creaking songs:
I fear, but now I see the coming rain,
and turn and grow and fall in rivers long

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