

A Preview of *The Review*

The St. John's University Humanities Review

Special Issue: "The Humanities As Activism"
Volume 14, Issue 1, Spring 2017

Michael Carosone, Guest Editor



This is the original CFP:

Call for Papers:
“The Humanities As Activism”
A Special Issue of *The St. John’s University Humanities Review*
Spring 2017

“The arts [humanities], it has been said, cannot change the world, but they may change human beings who might change the world.” –Maxine Greene

Focusing on the Humanities as activism, *The St. John’s University Humanities Review* (<http://stjenglish.com/st-johns-humanities-review>) is accepting submissions for its special issue, “The Humanities As Activism,” which will be published in the spring of 2017. The editors are seeking short personal narratives, reviews, interviews, and essays that address the Humanities as activism (short personal narratives of 200-500 words that discuss how you use, teach, or think about the Humanities as activism; reviews and interviews should be no more than 2000 words; essays should be no more than 5000 words).

The summer of 2016 proved the value of the Humanities. With the vigils for the victims of the massacre at the LGBTQ nightclub, Pulse, on “Latin Night,” in Orlando, Florida, in June, and the “Black Lives Matter” protests for two more Black men—Philando Castile and Alton Sterling—who were killed by the police, in July, the Humanities was immediately used as activism, responding to the social and political events and tragedies. Therefore, for this special issue, the editors are also seeking short personal narratives, reviews, interviews, and essays of/about the events of the summer of 2016: Orlando or Black Lives Matter.

Submissions might address but are certainly not limited to the following topics:

I. Category #1: The Humanities As Activism throughout History:

1. The various disciplines of the arts and humanities that are/were used as activism
2. Digital activism and the digital humanities
3. Activist pedagogies

II. Category #2: The Humanities Used for Orlando or Black Lives Matter:

1. Poetry was used at the vigils and protests
2. LGBTQ and Black aesthetics, philosophies, and histories were used
3. Artists, historians, intellectuals, philosophers, writers, journalists, politicians, and the general public responded to the events and tragedies; photographs, videos, etc. documented the events

The deadline for submissions is February 15, 2017, with a publication date of spring 2017. Submissions must be sent as Microsoft Word documents (.doc or .docx only) attached via email only to: michaelcarosone@gmail.com. Submissions must be single-spaced, using Times New Roman 12 point font, with one-inch standard margins, with footnotes instead of endnotes, and must adhere to a citation system that is suitable to the pertinent discipline. Personal narratives should be 200-500 words; reviews and interviews should be no more than 2000 words; essays should be no more than 5000 words.

A Note from the Editor:

Previous issues of *The St. John's University Humanities Review* mainly focused on book reviews, essays, and interviews. With this issue, I wanted to do something different, so I also asked for personal stories and essays that answered the question: How do you define and/or use the humanities as activism?

In the middle of May of 2016, when I was asked to edit this issue, I said yes. But what I didn't say was that I truly didn't want to do it, and that I didn't think that I was capable of doing it. This was because I felt that I had nothing new to say about the humanities that had not already been said ad nauseam.

Then, in June, 49 people were killed at the LGBTQ nightclub, Pulse, on "Latin Night," in Orlando, Florida. And I knew that homophobia shot those bullets.

Then, in July, two more Black men—Philando Castile and Alton Sterling—were killed by the police. And I knew that racism shot those bullets.

For me, it was a summer of attending vigils and protests. And I observed that the various disciplines of the arts and humanities were explicitly being utilized as activism in the streets at these vigils and protests. Specific language on protest signs. Writers reading poems at rallies. Performance artists theatrically marching. Etc.

This idea of the humanities as activism is not a new one for me because for many years, in my own work, I have been connecting the two. But I noticed that it was obvious that others realized that the two were inextricable. And that was when I knew that I had something new to say about the humanities, and that I would use this issue to say it.

And then Trump won the election.

Here, I present excerpts from some of the submissions that I received. These are forceful pieces that demand and deserve the same attention that we would give to any energizing speech at a protest rally. So, with your fists up, voices screaming, and feet marching, I hope that you enjoy this short preview of the journey that is this issue of *The Humanities Review*. And stay tuned for the longer movement. The revolution is coming and it will be documented in our journal.

In solidarity,
Michael Carosone
Guest Editor

Dedicated to the activists, artists, humanists, scholars, and writers,
to the oppressed and marginalized,
to the victims.
Dedicated to revealing the truth.

An Interview with Wazhmah Osman

Regina Corallo

(Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, St. John's University)

Wazhmah Osman is an independent filmmaker, activist, and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Studies and Production at Temple University. Her critically acclaimed documentary “Postcards from Tora Bora” (2007) is a deeply personal journey back home to Afghanistan, in which Osman captures the impact of war and loss nearly twenty-years after her family fled the country during the height of the Cold War. Osman is a member of the Afghan American Artists and Writers Association (AAAWA), and is extremely active in her work concerning ethical feminist media ethnographies, global media and knowledge production, and the politics of representation. I met Osman in 2015 after working with the AAWA on a charity event I organized, titled “Afghan Writers for Afghan Children.” As an Afghan American and member of the LGBTQ community, Osman was extremely vocal in the wake of the Orlando massacre by Omar Mateen. For this special issue, I reached out to Osman, once again, to discuss the tragedy, and question to what extent her work could be a source for activism.

Regina Corallo: Wazhmah, the focus of *The Review* is “The Humanities as Activism,” or rather, moments when the humanities can initiate activism. As such I would like to start there and then speak about your activist work around the Orlando Massacre. Can you please talk about how you see your academic and activism work overlapping?

Wazhmah Osman: It is a complex issue, that of being an activist in the humanities and more widely in public. Where does the desire stem from? Who gets to speak and represent whom? What are the structures that enable and disable activism in society? What does it mean to be an activist from a marginalized position versus from a position of privilege: a woman of color versus a white male? Studies have shown that even in alternative media, white men are still grossly and disproportionately brought in as experts.

Some of my favorite people are activists and my favorite academics are activists. They care deeply about issues and don't hide in their ivory towers but use their knowledge for the public good. That is one of the main reasons why I went back to school, to be able to contribute to and be a part of the public sphere. People from my part of the world, the global South and East, are often deemed as statistics and on the ground evidence. A highly educated individual in a position of power recently told me, to my astonishment, that we are not smart enough to synthesize information, and make broad connections and policy that directly impact us. Such beliefs also ring true of the marginalized and disenfranchised people of the inner cities and rural areas. I don't want to undermine the importance and efficacy of eyewitness accounts and personal memoirs and histories as activism. Yet the gatekeepers—whether in academia, media outlets, and other institutions of power of knowledge production—should also give us a platform to speak and write as experts especially on issues that we're trained in and are directly impacted by.

Here's where the question of objectivity comes in and is used to negate our expertise because it is assumed that if you are personally impacted by an issue that you are automatically not...

I Am Not an Activist

Angela Hooks

(Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, St. John's University)

Weeks after the Trayvon Martin shooting, I emailed the Black History Committee asking if we too would bring awareness to the plight of black people in guise of the shooting. I was co-chair of this committee that hosted a one-month celebration; I was a contingent faculty with five months left before my temporary full time contract expired with no renewal.

“No,” was the response, “We are not the committee to initiate a response.” One of my co-workers, and friend, suggested I back away, don’t stir the pot. I had five months left, and if tenure track became available, leading a protest would not be in my favor.

The faculty advisor of the political science club stepped into my office. “I heard you are the person to see about protesting, fighting back, bringing awareness to the injustice of the Trayvon Martin shooting.” The political science club wanted to rally. Compelled, I joined the ranks of the young undergrads desiring justice, and amalgamated those thinking we lived in a post racial society.

A few days before our rally, I asked all my students to wear hoodies on rally day. I sent an email to the English Department requesting they too wear hoodies. One professor confessed she didn't own a hoodie, but had a sweater with a hood.

On rally day, during student activity hour, students and faculty gathered in the lecture hall to discuss the concept of a post racial society, how media marketed the image of black males, negatively. A member of the local NAACP branch shared the survival rules if stopped by the police. She emphasized, black mothers and fathers, aunts or uncles tell their children these rules.

Afterwards, several of us marched around the campus, chanting “no justice, no peace.” One of my literature students recited a poem. For the moment, for the day we were all fighting injustice.

Despite this moment, I do not consider myself an activist. When I prepare a syllabus, and walk into my classroom I do not consider my work changing and shaping the world for the better. When I think of activists, Shirley Chisholm, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and Angela Davis come to mind—female advocates fighting for gender equity and social injustice that society ignores. Paul Robeson merging art, politics, social and moral ideology.

Years later, two things happened: one student asked if I were a feminist; another asked why black lives matter. I didn’t walk in the classroom with an agenda; I presented a body of literature, in which women were not only unfairly treated but also invisible, from Henrik Isben's play *A Doll's House*, to *The Memphis Diaries of Ida B. Wells*, to Sander Cisneros's “Only Daughter.” I hadn’t labeled myself a feminist. I believe men should still pick up the check, hold the door, and mow the lawn. Despite the progress women have made throughout the centuries, women...

Where Digital Citizenship, Social Media, and Activism Converge: @SoSadToday

Katherine Rockefeller

(Master's Degree Student, English Department, St. John's University)

In light of a shocking election, the tone of @sosadtoday's usually sardonic, casually dismissive tweets has undergone some alteration. Namely, she has become increasingly vocal in her political views, centrally her disdain for the Trump administration. Author and poet Melissa Broder openly suffers from and parlays a writing career off of fortunately manageable mental illness; she receives assistance managing the costs of her therapy and medications thanks to the Affordable Care Act. She uses Twitter to express her realization of the need for activism, whether it's sharing her gripes about the dismantling of the Affordable Care Act or acting as an advocate against issues that she strongly opposes, or sharing contacts of local politicians to her followers regularly, or encouraging them to call and make their voices heard. Broder utilizes the social media platform as a vehicle to express her disapproval of the current administration.

For author and poet Melissa Broder, what had once functioned as a personal outlet has become a political one. But in essence, how could the content not make such a shift in tone while her consciousness has been expanding as of late? Such a shift in consciousness is what now fuels her tweets, as she is currently utilizing her Twitter account as a vehicle to express her disdain for the Trump administration. She acknowledges that her shift in tone and content can be attributed as a result of the current political state of affairs. Admittedly, her content had already been emotionally and psychologically driven before the election, and her engagement in politics had been emanating from a consciousness of awareness. The formerly anonymous Twitter personality, @sosadtoday, spearheaded by the author and poet, typically embodies a digital consciousness steeped in existential, dramatic irony and inescapable, self-awareness.

These increasingly political manifestations on Broder's formerly a-political Twitter feed beg answers to the radically pertinent questions, such as: 1) What does it mean to be human on the Internet? (an identity that Broder is in constant exploration of); 2) Is it defined solely by the production of digital humanities?; 3) Further, is awareness of one's identity as a digital citizen contingent solely upon the publication of digital humanities, or are there other forms of digital engagement that constitute digital citizenship?

Broder has published a series of poetry, a collection of personal essays, and has a work of romantic fiction due out later this year. She also writes columns for *Elle* and *Vice*. Can actions like using social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to express dissenting viewpoints, or to protest philosophies with which one is diametrically opposed, or to engage the digital citizenry in order to organize effective demonstrations constitute digital citizenship? Broder regularly retweets activists' links to share information; for example, the recent airport protests. This point brings me to the heart of this specific exploration, which is what does it mean to be a digital citizen? Does embodying such an identity imply a semblance of authority or credibility? Broder's account was recently verified in September of 2016, which, from a formerly anonymous Twitter personality's perspective, could have compromised her artistic integrity, yet...

Thoughts on the Shooting in Orlando: Autobiography as Activism

Anwar Uhuru

(Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, St. John's University)

The idea of writing as a form of resistance for communities of color are older than the United States Declaration of Independence. Whether one reads the writings of Ottobah Cugoano, David Walker, Maria Stewart, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Amy Tan, Gloria Anzaldua, Maya Angelou, or Alice Walker the intersection of the self and the polemic are ways to fight within spaces that are both isolating and hierarchal for those in the margins. It is the inclusion of the self that allows for those that will read the words written from the perspective of those within the margins that systems of hierarchy can begin to be dismantled.

While attending a conference titled “Queer Disruptions,” I sat at a round-table discussion and the topic was “The State of Queer People of Color after the Pulse Massacre.” Pulse was an LGBTQI nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in which 49 were killed and an additional 53 were wounded. The person who actually committed this unbelievable act was Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old, Afghan American originally from Hyde Park, Queens, New York; who according to investigations was battling internalized homophobia. The shooting is one of the worst examples of crying out for help. It was alleged that Mateen would arrange sexual encounters via mobile phone apps in order to have sexual encounters with men. It was alleged that Mateen’s father and culture planted the seeds of internalized homophobia. It was alleged that Mateen would repeatedly hear countless homophobic statements such as, “Gay people should be killed.” Whether that is proof or non-proof of this deadly rhetoric, it will not bring back the dead, heal the wounded, nor will it bring a sense of stability to Mateen. Instead, his action only heightened the anti-Islam rhetoric that has been suffocating our ears and minds since the attacks on September 11, 2001.

The victims of the shooting were mostly Latinx in a part of the country that has a large Latinx population. Yet, their daily marginalia prior to and after the massacre only raises the level of erasure in regards to their status of citizenry and visibility within and outside of the LGBTQI community. It doesn’t make those that are socio-political minorities feel safe either. As a queer identified Black man, it only made me want to stay home and stare outside my window as the summer unfolded before my eyes. I could easily retreat to the excuse that I am writing a dissertation, teaching during the summer, or that I am on a budget that is abysmal by all accounts. However, the truth is, it made me face the amount of violence that I have been exposed to since I was 8 years old because I was not like the other children. The first time I was called a faggot, I was in gym class and all of the boys said “you didn’t throw the softball as far as you could have because you’re a faggot.” That was my initiation to routine verbal and physical taunts during and after school. If it wasn’t my not-yet-discovered sexuality, it was the fact that my grandmother gave me books and didn’t allow me to speak and/or use improper grammar, which was taunt number two: “you talk like a white boy.”

It didn’t help that my home life was saturated with patriarchy and the fact that comments like “oh, you remember so and so, he had so much sugar in his tank” or “I used to work with this guy who was sweeter than peach cobbler and he died of “the AIDS.” Followed by...

Stay Tuned for More...

1. Joshua Adair's "Adventurous Activism"
2. Shahd Alshammari's "Activism inside a Kuwaiti Classroom"
3. Malika Crutchfield's "Photographing Activism"
4. Kristie Betts Letter's "Remember When I Tell You This Story It May Change: Creative Humanities as Activism"
5. Barry Mauer's "The Citizen Curating Project Confronts the Pulse Nightclub Shooting"
6. Carys A. O'Neill's "Tragedy Turned into Digital Activism: Documenting the University of Central Florida's Response to Pulse"
7. Elizabeth Skwiot's "Wait for Nothing: Beckett, Activism, and Why I Teach Literature"
8. Yulia Tikhonova's "Curator as Activist"

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"Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet." –Alice Walker

"I write to imagine things differently—and in imagining things differently perhaps the world will change." –Terry Tempest Williams

"All good art is political." –Toni Morrison