

## Preface

This issue unites a collection of interviews, critical essays, and a book review in their common efforts to consider the study of the humanities as a kind of cognitive method for approaching the world at large and the world within. Personism, Frank O'Hara's poetic methodology, has framed and informed this issue's major themes, which involve the interplay between the personal and public spheres as they relate to and unite art, literature, politics, and history. In his 1959 manifesto, O'Hara explains that

[Personism] does not have to do with personality or intimacy, far from it! But to give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person.

In practice, this methodology often reads as a process by which political circumstance enters personal dialogue, as O'Hara often themes his poems around political subjects (such as Khrushchev's 1959 visit to the U.S.) while never abandoning that very personal communicability that defines his poetry. Personism's "overtones of love" run throughout this issue, with its unification of literary scholarship and socio-political critique that together forge a personal and public foundation

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upon which the humanities can be viewed as relevant in a world increasingly defined by globalization.

In the vein of O'Hara's Personism, this preface is addressed to you, Matt, the business executive that likes to ask if I've "read any good books lately."

### Interviews

This issue begins with a set of related interviews conducted in January and February, which deal with a range of postcolonial problems including cultural and national identity and individual agency. Bapsi Sidhwa introduces the vital interplay between the personal and public both textually and biographically, as she occupies a unique position as both a writer and former political figure. Her interview is particularly politically relevant following the assassination of the late Benazir Bhutto, whom Sidhwa worked with and criticizes virulently. Her desire to write "truth," as she says, is rooted in Sidhwa's personal interest in a kind of de-marginalization that elevates the writer into a political position—"For writers to ignore politics in third world countries," Sidhwa says, "is to present an inaccurate and untruthful reality"—and in so doing, elevates those often ignored by society into positions where they can and must be heard.

Just as one of the jobs of the writer is to interiorize truth and programmatically communicate that interior vision through language, the literary critic has the duty of carefully choosing what truths to create and how to balance the textual and the political. In the second conversation, Ania Loomba calls for an introspective examination of our condition within an American empire through an emphasis on communicative efficacy. Her argument that "All modes of pedagogy are political" extends beyond the conventional understanding of the phrase, as she cites the humanities as the "essential lifeblood of any society." Thus its practitioners must move beyond the academy and communicate ideas in ways that can reach a larger public. Both Sidhwa and Loomba consider the humanities as an essential base for humanity, as, in Loomba's terms, bread, not cake.

While the first pair of interviews asks us to strive toward understanding and communicating otherness both pedagogically and socially, the final piece in this section forces us to expand the term "Other" in a way that includes animals and the environment as parts of a larger ecological crisis that concerns the humanities. Nick Brandt's photo essay, which is accompanied by an interview, re-envisioned wild animals of East Africa through the lens of fine art photography, a project that is wholly his own. The complex interplay between art and politics could be no more apparent than in Brandt's photography, which is as aesthetically breathtaking as it is politically motivated. His call to action is genuinely personal—during our exchanges, he

spoke of an argument he had with a gardener regarding a poison that kills gophers—and, at the same time, politically communicable. To depict animals the way he does is to capture them, as Brandt says, in their state of "being," to illumine something of their souls through a lens pointing toward a time and place that may soon exist only through memory. He considers his work a eulogy to a vanishing world, and his place in this journal posits his work as a way to examine the potential for aesthetic astonishment to have programmatic political effects, to communicate internal vision to a world outside.

### Book Review

The problems of de-marginalization and cultural identification united with literary study are central to this issue's lone book review. David Treuer's *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* searches for, as Granville Ganter's title suggests, "Extremely Indian Fiction," a pursuit that problematizes the location of authentic cultural and national identification. Ganter's criticism of Treuer's formalist readings reflects this issue's main interests: the politics of aesthetics and the complex interplay between the critical and artistic interior and the pressures of an external reality. Ganter evokes conversations involving hybridity and origins that inform what he considers a "more sophisticated formalism," a formalism that posits our study of texts within a larger cultural understanding. As Ganter writes, "literary forms are a part of politics, society, culture, the whole thing." The humanities are integrated in a vast critical field that blurs these divisions in the location of a human—or, as Brandt encourages us to see, a much larger—condition.

### Critical Essays

In "Why I Write Horror," Sarah Langan explains the difficulties of identifying one's artistic priorities within a vast field of literary conventions and genres. Langan tackles many of the stigmas surrounding horror writers and reveals some of the reasons for the genre's recent successes, reasons that are rooted in political relevance and social healing. Her essay considers horror as an aesthetic method that is both technically and commercially founded in our social and political fears. Everyone, Langan concludes, should write horror, as a way of coping, as an escape from our global and domestic political fears through a fantastical interiorization of those threatening external forces.

Langan's integration of horror fiction within contemporary politics is continued in the subsequent essay, which examines post-9/11 anxiety through the literature and

film of Frankenstein's monster and Dracula, two fantasy villains that reflect the real problems of America's position in the war on terror; like these textual examples, America has produced and perpetuated its own monsters. Jesse Kavadlo makes a Freudian argument that we build and "amend" our monsters—they come into union with our creative forces, thus operating through an interiorized fear and an (imagined or real) exterior threat. Like Langan, Kavadlo considers these monsters as bodies through which we tackle our own fears in a world beyond our control. The parallels between our contemporary moment and Kavadlo's nineteenth and twentieth century textual examples allows him to use literature and film as historical models from which he formulates a political claim against a war on an intangible being: terror. The difference between these texts and our present moment is even more alarming and pedagogically useful—by examining the closed, controlled fields of the texts, we have the potential to gain control over our own political strife.

Building off of these claims regarding literature, history, and politics, Michael Modarelli presents a critical examination of "William James' Rhetoric of Truth." His analysis of truth as a rhetorical device is of interest to this issue because it de-centralizes truth as a temporal phenomenon rooted in empirical experience. His reading of James as an anti-dogmatic philosopher lends itself to the Bakhtinian claim that unified truth can only be found in a dialogue between subjects, which strengthens this issue's claim for the interdependency between interior vision and external communicability, an aesthetic-cognitive method rooted in a striving toward objectivity that never abandons its own subjective position. The political and cultural connotations of this claim can be related back to Sidhwa and Loomba, who elevate their de-marginalized creative and critical subjects onto a democratic plain where truth becomes truths.

The individual subject, and his or her relation to a larger cultural project, is the focus of Giuseppe Mazzotta's essay on freedom, which places our contemporary understanding of freedom in dialogue with a medieval tradition. Focusing on the works of Petrarch, particularly his *Bucolicum Carmen* and *De vita solitaria*, Mazzotta reveals the medieval treatment of freedom as a deeply personal problem within a larger cultural project that occupies a political space. Mazzotta suggests that, within the interior textuality of Petrarch's works, the poet locates the foundation for the construction of a new cultural project rooted in intellectual freedom. The interior realizations made in solitude transform into a politically programmatic ethos in *De vita solitaria*, a text devoted to solitude, and are then re-visioned within a larger political and historical context. Mazzotta provides a formal analysis with connotations for contemporary cultural critique that re-imagines the deeply personal odyssey toward intellectual freedom through a wider cultural context. He at once complicates and clarifies the interplay between the personal and public spheres by exposing the roots of freedom as the product of thought and action.

Finally, Stanley Sultan closes this issue with a treatise on the humanities as both a cognitive enabler and a public educational entity. He combines personal commentary with critical analysis to produce an essay that is wholly representative of this issue's larger project concerning the interplay between the personal and public spheres. Sultan suggests that the humanities have a responsibility for humanity—that is, the humanities offers us the cognitive training to make new connections among "Us," "Our Minds," and each other. Sultan's argument that all humans are worthy and capable in their basic cognitive abilities is rooted in close readings of a number of texts—ranging from Thomas Jefferson's letters to more contemporary literature on the politics of I.Q.—and provides a basis for profound personal, social, and political change. His case for intellectual equality, coupled with Brandt's assertion that animals are likewise capable and worthy, charges the study of the humanities with a humanist purpose, one that asks for a personal examination in the formulation of critical, social, and political arguments and policy. The elevation of the self through intellectual freedom contributes to the likewise elevation of other selves as true and perfect beings: sentient, capable, and worthwhile.

Placed together in a sequence, these pieces characterize an ethos through the study of the humanities. This issue is, broadly, about loving one another, about re-imagining the world as a place where we can all feel whole and at home.

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This will be my final issue as editor, so thanks to all of you who have made this year possible. This has been an exciting and rewarding project, one that has contributed greatly to my own development as a thinker and human.

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