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Attic Salt

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2024

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**ATTIC SALT**

*[Sal Atticum]*





Loyola Marymount University  
The University Honors Program  
1 LMU Drive, Suite 4400  
Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659

All correspondence should be sent to the above address.

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# ATTIC SALT

noun (Latin, Sal Atticum)

1. Graceful, piercing, Athenian wit.
2. An interdisciplinary journal which accepts submissions in any genre, format, or medium—essays, original research, creative writing, videos, artwork, etc.

– From the entire LMU community and the Honors programs of AJCU institutions nationwide.

# *[Staff]*

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Sevilla Chapman

## **EDITORIAL STAFF**

Nikki Chun

Emerson Eby

Laura Haushalter

Serena Louie

Gabby O'Brien

Erika Valencia

## **PUBLICATION DESIGNER**

Cecilia Conforti

## **FACULTY ADVISOR**

Dr. Alexandra Neel

## [From the Editors]

When we arrived at LMU, then-Honors Director Dr. Trevor Zink asked us the following simple, but formative question: “What is Honors?” We didn’t know. Our whole lives we associated “honors” with material achievement. The students with the best report cards took honors classes, and the highest scoring students in those classes received honors themselves. However, at that moment in UHall-1000, we knew that was no longer the case. After all, the application required a thirty-minute adventure through Wikipedia links and no test scores. No, Honors is much more.

Honors is interdisciplinary. Driven by genuine curiosity to learn what one does not know, Honors students take on multiple majors in vastly different fields, fully engage in an expansive core, and attend various intellectual events across campus.

Honors is *cura personalis*. Meaning “care for the whole person,” *cura personalis* describes St. Ignatius of Loyola’s value of growing all facets of oneself, including mind, body, and spirit. Our Honors, full of students with multiple fields of study, also develop their bodies and spirits, with activities ranging from half-marathon training to service organization leadership.

Honors is standing up for what is right. Honors students understand the importance of inclusivity in academic spaces, and they are not afraid to fight for historically marginalized groups.

Of course, Honors is not exclusively for those officially enrolled in the University Honors Program. Anyone can “enroll” in Honors at any time. Any time someone embodies these values, they participate in Honors.

To us, *Attic Salt* is Honors. By definition, it is interdisciplinary. Its authors and editors are some of the most curious and creative people we know. As a reader, you’ll find that their work will touch your whole person. Importantly, *Attic Salt* will stand against injustices, instead valuing and advocating for inclusion. And, like Honors, it is so much more.

We deeply appreciate the people who contributed to the creation of this journal. We would especially like to thank Dr. Alexandra Neel, who served as our faculty advisor. Thank you to our fantastic staff of editors, whose many hours of reviewing and editing made this journal possible. We would also like to thank the LMU Honors Program, Dr. Jeffrey Wilson, Nubia Valenzuela, and Dr. Carissa Phillips-Garrett for their continued support. We could not have published this journal without the design contributions of Dr. Garland Kirkpatrick and publication designer Cecilia Conforti. We would also like to thank everyone who submitted to our journal, without whom we would have no publication at all. We are so sincerely grateful to everyone who has worked to make this all possible.

We hope that you enjoy reading this journal as much as we enjoyed creating it.



**JAKE WALTER & BRADY ALLISON**  
Co-Editors in Chief



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ATTIC

SALT

# ARIANNA JAVID

*[Things We Don't Say]*

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## POETRY

Arianna Javid is a first-year student at Santa Clara University studying political science. She recently published a self-help book for young adolescents facing the many challenges associated with moving and has continued to pursue her passion of creative writing on the side. In her work, she aspires to connect with others and hopes to get more of her writing published in the future.

## *[Things We Don't Say]*

I speak to my father in rock music

I climb up the foothold in the car door while he scrambles to play a song I've heard before but won't mind hearing again. We slip out of the driveway and the console shuffles through familiar names like a child rummaging through a flimsy photo album. The blur of dimly lit street lights floods the edges of the window, but my father's gaze rests just above the steering wheel.

I have his eyes and his burning desire to be great. I sit the way he sits; perfectly upright but restless. I drive too fast like him and never quite know when to stop. We keep moving even if the world forces us to remain still.

Listening to electric screams pry desperately through the speakers is my way of saying

*I hear you dad. I don't begin to know the battles you fight when you're away or the ones you play out in your mind, but I'm here with you.*

*And I hope that's enough.*

I'm in a truck sitting the way he does and humming along because that's what I can do. I can watch the road erase itself and let each numbing thrash fill the space between us. I can drum on the dash and kick up my feet and make him crack a smile. I can trace the asphalt before us and not know what he's thinking, but hear his words in every tap on the wheel, every glance toward me.

This chaos, these lyrics, are his love. In a passenger seat, going nowhere, this is how I show mine.

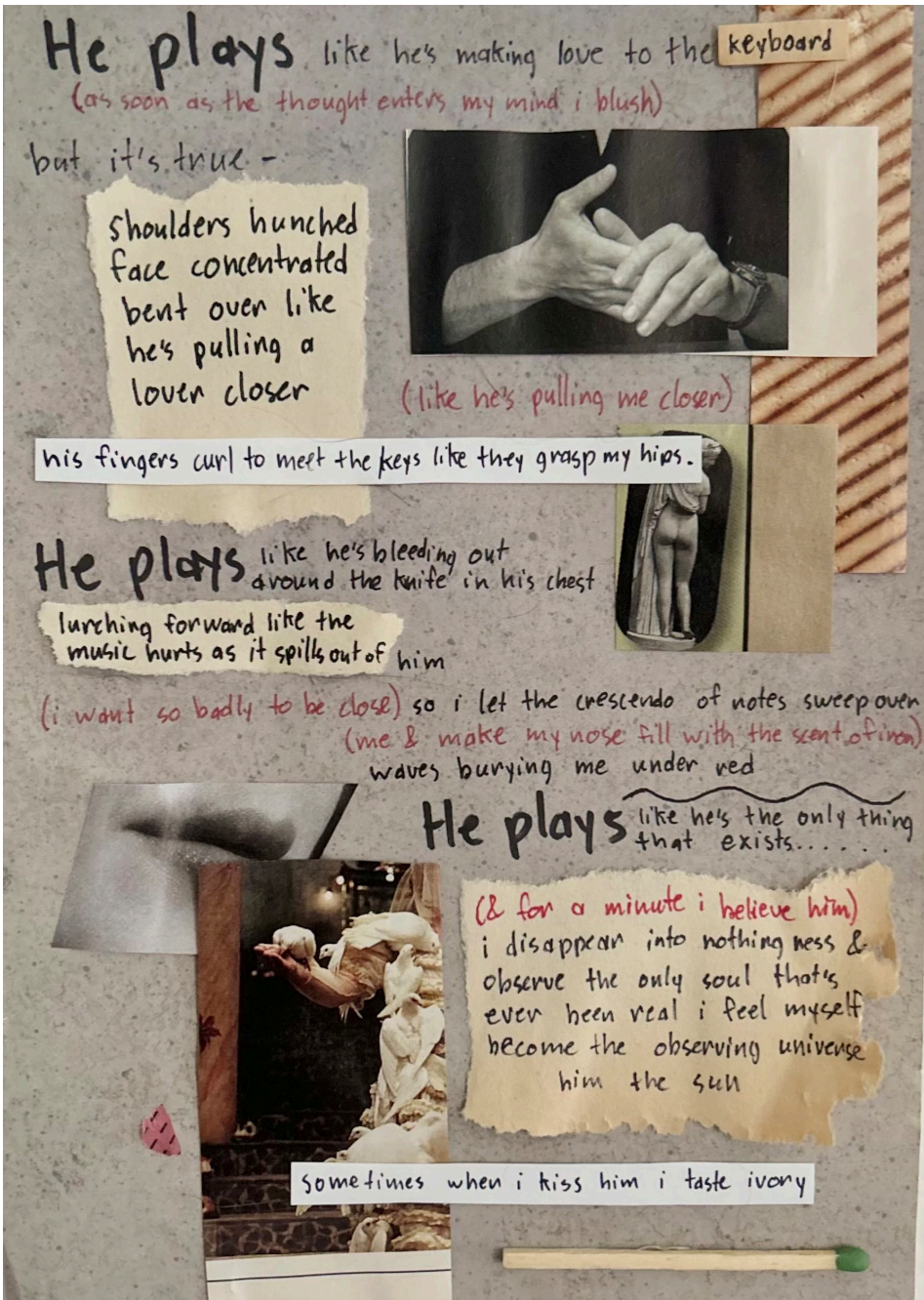
# JULES BROWN

*[When I Kiss Him I Taste Ivory Keys]*

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MULTIMEDIA

Jules Brown's name is Jules and sometimes they exist. Enjoy!



When I Kiss Him I Taste Ivory Keys



# ARWEN MIRANDA

*[Le Singe]*

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## PAINTING

Arwen is a sophomore Psychology Major and aspiring Animation minor at Loyola Marymount University. Growing up riddled with ADHD, Arwen constantly drew comics, ran around till she got tired, and played a mean sax. Today, she draws anything she thinks is cool, reads books she thinks are cool, and listens to music she's pretty sure isn't cool. At night, she dreams of strange nouns, hoping she can transmit them into the waking world through her art.



*Le Singe*

# ADERET MURÉ PARRINO

*[Siddhartha Shakur]*

*[When the Tower Falls]*

*[Banko's Sunflowers]*

*[To Be a Boy]*

*[They Say Blood Is Thicker Than Water]*

## POETRY

Aderet Muré Parrino is a queer poet whose advocacy work, interpersonal relationships, and spirituality influence their work. Aderet is committed to arts as resistance and healing. They feel joy and rest through displaying complexities, and expressing love and pain through written word. They would like their work to bring the reader through paths of mourning, healing, and calls to action. Part of their philosophy is the commitment to bring forth the cultivation of a more sacred, just, and kind world, with arts as a mode of activation.

*[Siddhartha Shakur]*

When 2Pac said,  
We got money for wars,  
But can't feed the poor,  
That reminded me,  
Of Buddha's Third Dharma Seal,  
Which tells us,  
Of the dissolution of good and bad,  
Upon reaching nirvana.

But, 2Pac is dead.  
And, we still can't feed the poor.  
And there remains this sickly colonial idea,  
That "I am king."  
But, Buddha is not known as Siddhartha Gautama.  
Because he is not king.  
Instead, he wanted to feed the poor.

When 2Pac said,  
Dear Mama,  
With reverence and awe,  
That reminded me,  
Of the Indigenous love of our Mother.

But, 2Pac is dead.  
And there still remains  
Every legal right to abuse our Mother.  
But, what is legality in the face of  
That feeling of bare feet touching the earth?

When Damian Marley sang,  
Where there's,  
More hungry mouths than food to eat  
That reminded me,  
Of Buddha's First Dharma Seal,  
Which tells us,  
Of the impermanence  
Of this body.

But, Damian Marley is just dismissed as another dread head.  
And, there's still more hungry mouths than food to eat.  
And, it seems like  
No one wants to heal  
From this sickly colonial system,  
Of ignoring the needy,  
And feeding the pit-stomached pigs.

When Bob Marley sang,  
A hungry mob is a angry mob,  
With fire and pain,  
That reminded me,  
Of the generational power of resistance.

But, Bob Marley is dead.  
And there still remains  
Systemic starvation.  
There also remains a beautifully angry and waiting mob.

When Marvin Gaye cried out,  
How much more abuse from man,  
Can she stand?  
That reminded me,  
Of Buddha's Second Dharma Seal,  
Which tells us,  
That we are nothing,  
Without each other.

But, Marvin Gaye is dead.  
And, I don't think she can stand much more abuse.  
And there remains this foolish ruse.  
And there remains this looming and dire growling.

This growling of stomachs,  
This growling of the earth as her bones shift under our feet.

This roaring of voices,  
This roaring of currents as she pummels our heads.

And,  
This reminds me,  
Of the definition of Karma (a return of energy).  
How it is interlinked with the definition of Dharma (universal truth).

And,  
This tells me,  
That the Truth of our Universe  
Is in the process of crashing down on our heads,  
And that will be our return on the energy which we have stolen.

2Pac is dead. Yes. And the wars continue. Yes. And the poor will revolt. Yes.  
For, we are interconnected.  
2Pac is dead. Yes. And our Mama will only be dear to us for so much longer.  
Yes. And our feet are glued to this ground.  
Damian Marley's head is filled with dread. Yes. And the hungry mouths bite  
hard. Yes. And the pits will soon devour the pigs. Yes. And nothing is  
permanent, especially power.  
Bob Marley is dead. Yes. But the mob lives on. Yes. And the fire has burned,  
is burning, will burn.  
Marvin Gaye is dead. Yes. And the duality is more prominent than ever. Yes.  
And the ruse is dissolving, Yes, and the poor people, the starving people,  
the people of color, yes, the descendants of the enslaved, the immigrants,  
the farmers, Yes, the everyday, the overlooked, the underfunded, people,  
will reach nirvana first. They are the hungriest for change.

## *[When the Tower Falls]*

So we are gnashing our teeth and baring them  
Against the buckles of this culture of suppression  
Motivated misunderstanding  
And misinformed accusations.  
So we are thrashing our heads and banging them  
Against these walls of bullshit binarity  
And biological rigidity.  
So we are  
Strategizing together  
In a collective critical unity  
Pulling out blocks of this mad Jenga game  
Called queer identity politics.  
So we will slowly push out those blocks which harm us,  
Sickle in our left hand,  
Miss Davis taught us well.  
And brick in our right,  
Miss Marsha taught us well.  
We will carry history on our backs  
And love on our fronts.  
We will switch the lens to a kaleidoscope  
And watch the colors and textures finally feel safe to play again.  
We must change the lens  
In order to see brighter days.  
We must,  
In essence,  
Queer the Eye  
For the Straight Guys  
In power.  
Dykes, gather your combat boots for this dirt,  
Fairies, gather your fans for this fire,  
In-betweens, wield your slingshots and your swords,  
We are preparing for an ideological war,  
We are preparing for the defense of our trans families  
In Florida,  
In Texas,  
Our drag queen sisters  
In Tennessee,  
In Arizona,  
We will follow their lead,  
And stand tall,  
Eyes wide,  
Frames unshakeable,  
We will begin this brawl  
For recognized humanity,  
We must,  
And we will,  
Watch, with smiles,  
As the tower of legislation falls.

*[Banko's Sunflowers]*

Tongo Eisen-Martin: "The only evidence that I exist is that I'm having an effect on you."

Honest poetry is more important -  
no, valuable -  
than good poetry-  
rather, honest poetry makes good poetry-  
unabashedly write your bashfulness until it is replaced-  
no-  
as long as it lasts-

Confidence need not always be the goal, nor the defining factor of your art-  
maybe Van Gogh cut off his ear because the thoughts of his own  
judgments about them drowned out the sunflowers' stunning  
silence-  
maybe i need to cut off my hand in order to let my pen run free-  
maybe the sunflowers dance when no one's looking-  
maybe when Banko Brown's blood rushed onto the  
streets, all of Our blood went rushing out of our hands onto our papers-  
maybe the sunflowers were always dancing  
And their frustration was drowned out by our own-  
maybe my poems don't have to be good-  
maybe i don't have to be confident-  
maybe the sunflowers are showing me the beauty of  
silence-

Maybe confidence is a capitalist value-  
maybe my poems and i can just be-  
actually, though-  
not the way that hippies say it-  
actually, though-  
i don't care about beauty anymore-

I don't care about  
"Beautiful poem" says the New York Times critic" -  
fame creates atrophy-  
i only want my muscles to hurt because i ran so fast, loved so hard, not  
because others loved me out of my authenticity-  
honesty is my goal-

Maybe there is no goal but growth-  
sunflowers rise and rise and do not have an end, they dance and they give,  
and if we listen very closely,  
one ear lying down in a bed of grass and one ear still attached to our  
heads,  
we may be able to hear them for once-  
what are they saying? -  
they're quiet-  
they rise and their silence nearly takes the tongue out of your mouth  
and gives you back your ear, Van Gogh,  
To be unabashedly and intentionally unsure is the nature of life... I guess? -  
what do i know? -  
that's the point-  
how do i know? -

maybe there is no point, like a period is never an  
 end and  
 Periods only exist to separate one thought from the next because there will  
 always be a next-  
 maybe-  
 who am i to make absolutes? -  
 we're all just theorizing in a world where we're taught to put  
 periods after each sentence-  
 the word period is interesting because it simply signifies  
 duration-  
 not end-  
 the end of a sunflower is the roots and the other end  
 is the sky-  
 the sunflower itself is duration-  
 we are duration-  
 occupy this body for a duration til my ends meet the soil and the sky-  
 where Van Gogh's ear ended, the space between his mind and his world  
 began, so he cut it off and in losing part of himself, he let the fresh air  
 enter into the deepest cavity of his brain-  
 learning to listen anew-  
 imperfectly-  
 unsurely-  
 bashfully and intentionally, he painted flowers-  
 unabashedly, Banko's end came too quick, -  
 What purpose does a period serve if it caps your sentence befo-

Banko Brown- rest in power-  
 He lies, ends in the earth- rather-  
 Period of life, sturdy stem chopped  
 Down- instead of being loved  
 Out of authenticity- his  
 Authenticity outlived  
 Him- for us to  
 Inherit- the  
 Worst way  
 To go



## *[To Be a Boy]*

I didn't have opportunity to be "boy" growing up, so all my "boy" is coming out now, I wanted to then but couldn't, I wanted to participate in masculinity but couldn't, Bailey and I heal our inner children now by bonding through boyhood... how do I make my body a nice place to live? How do I not apologize for my queer body?

You've heard "if you can't beat em, join em,"

Now get ready for my gender pressure tagline:

"If you can't join em, beat em"

Is what i unconsciously lived by

In high school attempting to be more man than the boys,

Proving my masculinity- worth- was lifting more,

Dove Cameron style, being a better boyfriend,

Traditional butch masc style, having more confidence- on the outside at least,

Puffing my chest and then not for fear it would look too full,

I was not a man, nor am I now,

Nor was I perceived as one, sometimes on lucky days,

I am now,

But boy,

Did I want to be a boy,

But if I scared the boys,

Although I would not have a space

In their boyish masculinity,

I could carve out my own as alien - intimidating,

More than boy or girl combined,

I have been called intimidating,

Might this be good?

Might this simply be reminiscent of otherness,

Nonbelonging, nonbinariness,

I was given and raised in a girlhood defined by

Overt "GRL PWR" and covert boy dominance,

Because of my obvious girlhood,

My entry ticket to dominance and masculinity were denied

Upon looking at me, but my power was not,

So I leaned into my status as una mujer brava,

Stubborn, bold, and loud woman with too many damn opinions and

Not enough tameness, I was on guard, a lover of women and

Threat to men, I arrived in the Bay Area and dismantled,

My boy met other boys,

Dar Williams sings about "a boy on her bike,"

Maybe we don't have to be boys to be like that boy

On her bike, grass-stained, able to climb a tree

In ten seconds flat, my she/her turned she/they turned

They/them turned, turning, turning those wheels

On that damn bike, my boy is coming out of her shell,

When Bailey says, "alright boys" to a room full of they/she's, they/them's

and He/him's who were told to be she/her's, my heart sings because our

Language in queerness is so revolutionary that I unleash

My middle school boy who wanted to laugh

Raucously, I can by way of my community

With kids who were denied

Their fullness of expression,  
 My boyiness was once denied, and other's girliness was, too,  
 And by boyiness and girliness, I mean,  
 Who did you sit with at lunch? Who did you compete against? Who did you  
 learn from?  
 Did you climb trees and not cry, or did you pick flowers and over  
 exaggerate?  
 Which line were you in? Bubbles in your mouth, quiet coyote, coyote jaws  
 snapped shut into submission, who were you told you could be, but more  
 importantly who were you shown  
 You had to be?  
 Of course, I know tree-climbing doesn't make  
 You, boy,  
 And flower-picking doesn't make  
 You, girl,  
 But at one point, didn't it? At one point,  
 Weren't our lives made of that? So won't it be  
 In our collective memory of what color our childhood took place in and  
 consequently stained  
 Our hearts with?  
 So, you whose soul was given little boy,  
 Go giggle and pick flowers and sob,  
 You whose soul was given little girl,  
 Go laugh loud and ride fast and get dirty,  
 You may find that, once having explored, we are much closer  
 To the middle than we may have thought.

I did end up joining the boys and beating them, too.  
 For I have experienced the pains of girlhood, the fears and  
 Powers of womanhood, and the vastness of a continued journey towards  
 healthy masculinity,  
 I have been a better boyfriend and am now one of the boys, I wear combat  
 boots and  
 Aim to stride through the world  
 With the unabashed audacity that mediocre men with dicks harness,  
 All while my dick only operates when attached to harness, and I have not  
 shaken the label  
 Of intimidating, for I have not stopped truth-telling, and that is okay with  
 me,  
 So right now I am embracing boy  
 In order to make up for the years I have suppressed him, but life is long,  
 And I suppose we'll see where my bike takes me next

*[They Say Blood Is Thicker Than Water]*

They say blood is thicker than water,  
I say booze is thicker than blood,

So at our ofrenda,  
We have no cerveza,  
Not a cuervo or corona in sight,  
No smirnoff or asbolut,

For I am the seed of my ancestors,  
Determined to not be like them,

When I said my blood family is far away,  
I did not mean proximity.

My mushrooms are growing,  
From the dead and decayed,  
My mushrooms are growing towards the light of connection,  
Spores flown free,

Here, we do not pour libations  
But fight for liberation,

I wonder what it was like for him to come here  
To a country which did not want to have him,  
I wonder if that's why booze seemed thicker than blood to him,  
I cannot ask him  
Because the mushrooms have already begun to grow,  
I think about him more  
Now that he's gone  
Than when he was here,  
Was he ever really here?  
Or was his heart still alive  
In the country where he was a little boy,  
In the city where he could walk and bike  
And say his real name with pride?

But, on the other side,  
I am the seed of ancestors I do not know  
From countries I did not know existed.  
And I do not want to know them.

My family tree looks more like knots which form a question mark,

So, then, whose seeds bloom from within me?

I am the seeds of ancestors  
Whose histories I can read about  
Whose righteous indignation holds mine with loving arms,  
I am the seeds of ancestors whose ancestors did not love them,  
But who fought to have descendants to love,  
I am the seeds of transcestors,  
Real religious resisters,

Freedom fighters,  
Common ground creators,  
I feel them when I breathe in polluted air and hold my eyes to the sky,  
It is a reminder to keep going,  
I feel them when I lie in bed with my love and cry,  
It is a reminder to keep going,  
I feel them when the sun is shining down and my head tilts up high,  
It is a reminder to keep going,  
I feel them when my tongue makes poetry without trying,  
It is a reminder to keep going,  
I feel them when I fall asleep among my chosen family, so relaxed that I am  
drooling,  
It is a reminder to keep going,  
I feel them, reminding me to keep growing.

I have lost so much family who share my blood,  
Without them even becoming ancestors.

So, booze is not thicker than blood is not thicker than water.  
Water, actually, is all we need  
For our seeds to grow.  
So, I am the seed of those who water me.  
I am the seeds of the ancestors whose tears of pride for who I've become  
Rain down on me  
Like blessings,  
Make my roots spread out, up, and forward,  
Nearly blind me with the flood of love,  
Whose care builds up in their chests and flows into me,  
Non-transactionally,  
Purely, Intentionally, Naturally,  
I am the seeds of my ancestors  
Who may not have had a home to return to,  
And so made one,  
And invited us all in.

# MAKENZIE GANJE

*[Partisan Media's Threat to a  
Democratic Electorate]*

ATTIC SALT • 2024

## ESSAY

Makenzie Ganje (she/her) is an undergraduate student at Loyola Marymount University, majoring in Political Science and minoring in Business Administration with a concentration in Business Law. Her passion for domestic and international politics, as well as the legal system, was ignited through her active involvement in smaller communities. Makenzie finds joy in delving into the complexities of the political system, viewing it as a means to advocate for those who may lack the ability to represent themselves. She hopes to pursue law school after graduating.

## **[Partisan Media's Threat to a Democratic Electorate]**

*Climate Change Experts' Bullying Is Not About Helping the Earth, It Is About Controlling Us.*  
- Fox News host Tucker Carlson

*Gut-Wrenching Climate Report Leaves Even More Fingers Pointing At Political Inaction.*  
- Huffington Post reporter Kate Nicholson

How can citizens interpret political information in the face of ideological news? Partisan media strongly threatens the quality of the U.S. political system. News stations divided by ideology often only include information that serves their beliefs. In 1949, the Fairness Doctrine required news stations to devote time to a countering view of the public issue they reported on. The policy was repealed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1987 because the equal airtime requirement was seen as a violation of the freedom of speech protected in the Constitution's First Amendment. However, to improve the quality of U.S. politics, it is necessary to create a policy that implements aspects of the Fairness Doctrine, such as requiring news outlets to present a conflicting viewpoint. Requiring that politically charged media platforms include fair and balanced coverage of controversial topics will increase voters' trust in the press and encourage compromise in the government by limiting party polarization.

Firstly, partisan media produces citizens' distrust of the press. In a scientific journal by the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), researchers created a study in which participants interacted exclusively with a left-leaning or right-leaning news station, either *Fox News* or *Huffington Post*. After participants were assigned to a news station, "57% of those in the Fox News treatment group increased their visits to *Fox News* compared to baseline, and 50% of the *HuffPost* group increased their visits to *HuffPost*" (Guess 3). Increased exposure to politically charged news stations, "caused among [the] subjects a decrease in overall trust and confidence in the mainstream media" (Guess 4). The PNAS study shows that the more citizens are exposed to partisan media, the less likely they are to place confidence in news sources (Guess 5).

As a result, voters who distrust the media rely primarily on their party identification when making voting decisions. The American National Election Studies (ANES) conducted a study on media trust and voting where they asked several respondents if "media coverage of politics often reflects the media's own biases more than facts" (Ladd 579). ANES found that "those with negative attitudes toward the media are significantly more likely to cast a partisan presidential vote" (Ladd 579). In his study, Jonathan Ladd utilizes ANES' research and finds a similar pattern in the 2004 presidential election data. Ladd reinforces his hypothesis and finds that future implications of media distrust will lead to an increase in partisan voting (Ladd 580-581). Citizens who lack confidence in the information provided by the media are forced to rely on "existing stores of knowledge" (Ladd 581), or their party affiliation. Firmly relying on a candidate's party identification ignores crucial information on candidates' policies, morals, and beliefs on prominent issues. Implementing a policy that requires news stations to be representative of other political views will create balanced and trustworthy news sources for citizens to find accurate information and make informed voting decisions.

Secondly, partisan media causes polarization between voters, resulting in extremist views. In 2020, the Pew Research Center reported that of thirty different news sources for political and election news, “almost half of the sources included in this report (13) are trusted by at least 33% of Democrats, but only two are trusted by at least 33% of Republicans” (Jurkowitz, Mark, et al). The gap in media trust between Democrats and Republicans shows that members of political parties live in separate “echo chambers” in which their news sources reinforce their existing political ideology. Moreover, Matthew Levendusky, a political science professor at the University of Pennsylvania, finds that partisan media’s coverage of political topics catalyzes extreme voters, who are becoming increasingly divided. In his experiment, Levendusky assigns participants to video clips from different media programs. After an analysis of the subjects’ pre-test and post-test questionnaires, Levendusky found that one out of three people assigned to like-minded media “...become more extreme, a relative increase in an extremity of 44 percent” (19). Exposure to like-minded media increases polarization and extremist views among a substantial amount of the population.

Correspondingly, partisan media creates voters with extreme ideological beliefs who often put the most pressure on candidates to take extreme positions and reject compromise. For example, in 2009 *Fox News* described the Tea Party Movement as “an American call to action” amid the “Left’s Assault on Liberty” (Comins). Their patriotic word choice energized many extremists to support the movement and vote for Rand Paul in the 2010 primary election. Paul won the primary election in Kentucky primarily because of the “tea party activists” who advocated for him. More recently, Republican opposition to environmental policy portrays how partisan media divides political parties. Tucker Carlson urged Republican officials and voters to block climate legislation, portraying climate change experts as “bullies” who are “controlling the Earth” (*Fox News*). Since news organizations display starkly different perspectives on the importance of climate change, many researchers believe that environmental policy failures are due to growing polarization in America (Levendusky 20). As voters become increasingly polarized, political candidates also tend to align themselves with positions that appeal to their winning coalition, aiming to secure and maintain power. Consequently, as more candidates and influential leaders adopt polarized stances, timely resolutions to pressing issues become elusive. The prevalence of partisan media makes it incredibly difficult to reach a bi-partisan agreement or solve any type of social problem. Therefore, the implementation of balanced coverage in politically oriented news stations is necessary to reduce polarization and increase compromise on critical issues.

Some may argue that implementing a policy similar to the Fairness Doctrine infringes upon the First Amendment right to free speech. The concern is that mandating news outlets to present a conflicting viewpoint might be perceived as government interference in editorial decisions. However, it is beyond crucial to note that the proposed policy would specifically target politically charged news stations. In the face of political polarization in the United States, the emphasis should shift towards prioritizing the broader public interest over a rigid interpretation of free speech rights. The intention behind such a policy is not to suppress or dictate content but to ensure a more balanced representation of political news. In an era where extreme ideological divisions threaten the fabric of democratic discourse, promoting a media environment that fosters

bipartisan dialogue and compromise becomes necessary. The objective is not to curtail free speech but to encourage a more nuanced and inclusive media landscape that serves the greater good of the democratic process. Without a doubt, the potential infringement on the First Amendment should be weighed against the pressing need to mitigate polarization and enhance the quality of political discourse in the United States.

Ultimately, implementing a policy that requires news stations to present both sides of a controversial topic would improve the way contemporary media and the U.S. political system operate. Partisan media's impact on distrust of the press and party polarization is evident in how it affects voters and political candidates. Ideological information undermines the electorate's ability to make sound decisions. If partisan media creates a poorly informed electorate, America's democracy cannot function properly. A representative press is vital for voters to make wise choices and hold leaders accountable. Voters must have accurate information to vote for elected officials and public policy that represents their needs instead of blindly following a political party or news station.

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# KATHERINE DOVAN

*[Euroscape]*

*[Sum of Pieces]*

*[Up, Up, and Away]*

ATTIC SALT • 2024

## MULTIMEDIA

Katie Dovan, originally from Nashville, discovered her love for the arts at a young age. With a foundation in painting and drawing, Katie has since expanded her mediums to also include digital art, photography, and cinematography. Inspired by the beauty around her, Katie seeks to mesh introspective contemplation with visual observation. Her art delves into themes of innocence, growing up, and change. In a world where everything is constantly moving forward at a rapid pace, Katie finds comfort in capturing key moments and creating pieces that can transcend time.





*Sum of Pieces*





KATHERINE DOVAN • UP, UP, AND AWAY

*Up, Up, and Away*

# KATHERINE WOLFF

*[All Rats Go to Heaven]*

ATTIC SALT • 2024

## SHORT STORY

Katherine (Katy) Wolff is a third-year honors student at Santa Clara University double majoring in Communication and English with double minors in Creative Writing and Theatre. She currently serves as the fiction editor at the Santa Clara Review, and has been published previously in *Prometheus Dreaming*, *Attic Salt*, the *Santa Clara Review*, and *The Owl*. She was a fiction finalist for the 2023 Hollins University Lex Allen Literary Festival, and her short story, “Troubled Teen Money Machine” was a 2023 Best of Net nominee.

## *[All Rats Go to Heaven]*

There's a dying rat in the gutter, and I have a cigarette burn cracking open my chin like a crater, leaking pus like slow-moving magma. This grotesque creature before me has wounds of his own, oozing sores peppering his gray body, patchworked with clumps of thin, oily fur. The sight of him laying there, his gnarled feet twitching, is enough to bring the taste of bile to the back of my throat, but I can't avert my eyes. He has no one else but me to watch over him, both of us stranded vermin on a dark city street. For some reason, my vigil for this rat has begun before his little rodent soul has passed on to whatever heaven he'll go to.

\*\*\*

The cigarette burn was apparently an accident—my mother, piss-drunk and chain-smoking in her boyfriend's basement apartment, just wanted to tell me a secret, and my face, half-obscured in the haze of stagnant smoke, had gotten a little too close to the disintegrating ember. Or maybe her hand had gotten a little too close to my face. Either way, the burn was a minor concern given what she said.

"Why couldn't you have stayed gone?"

And suddenly I was eighteen again, black duffel hanging off my shoulder, scrounging through the kitchen hoping to find anything I could to take with me—soup, crackers, maybe a long-expired package of the fruit snacks that my mother used to buy me, back when the linoleum wasn't so cracked and she didn't look at me with so much hate, resenting me for stealing everything she could've been—young, beautiful, free, happy. But there was nothing but some rotting pears, the flesh brown and mushy, food for flies, food for rats. So I left it alone, crept out into the streets on a January midnight, started walking to the couch I had been offered, the one that was three miles north through the maze of the city. Light snow fell on my lashes, freezing under the smoggy sky as the minutes passed and my toes went numb. There was soup in my best friend's apartment, there was a soft warm hug waiting from her mother, but even still, I masochistically missed the cold sharp edges of mine. I never really stopped hoping that maybe one day I'd come back and find that there were fruit snacks in her pantry again.

Then the cigarette struck my chin ever so briefly, with only the slightest sizzle of burning skin. The agony was short-lived, a blunt wound, nothing out of character for her. She tapped the crumbling ash off casually, almost apathetically, the cig held loosely between the fingers of her gesturing hand. I said nothing, staring into the dragon eyes of my mother, dark and cruel, pupils tinged red with the reflection of the still-lit cherry. She stared back, holding my gaze until the ash overtook the smoldering end and the room grew even dimmer. She had no reason to lie, never had. I must have known it when I left four years ago, and I certainly knew it now. own it when I left four years ago, and I certainly knew it now.

Still, as I slowly turned away to leave the suffocating room, I couldn't help but wonder if she'd say anything. If she'd even make a noise, a sigh, anything that would indicate some sort of emotion. If not regret, at least anger. Maybe she would scream at me, try to start a fight like she did when I still lived with her, when I was always falling through the cracks in the thin ice that the teenage me walked on every day. But all I heard was the click of a lighter, the harsh serpentine hiss of butane, and instead of looking back like I wanted to, I walked quicker, taking the stairs two at a time, like remaining there even one more second would trap me in her lair forever. The

The rush of winter that greeted me dissipated the smell of tar and brimstone, icing the burn, and I found myself relieved to be surrounded by frost instead of fire. Tonight, the cold was a welcome companion.

As I waited on the sidewalk for my roommate to pick me up, the jerking movements of the rat caught the corner of my eye, and I braved the few icy steps to approach it, to observe it in an ill, unsettling silence, interrupted only by a lone siren several streets away. In the dimness of the flickering streetlamps, there was really nothing for me to do but stand and stare, sucking in the bitter wind in search of a brain freeze. I hoped the cold had seeped into the rat, numbing his nerves, covering him in a weighted blanket to ease the passing, to spur the acceptance of total dark detachment. Frost crept in through my nostrils, finally putting all my thoughts on ice. I hoped for snow.

\*\*\*

That's where my roommate finds me, standing by the gutter grave, silently crafting an obituary for a disgusting rat that just took its last horrible breath.

"What are you looking at?" I hear her soft voice beside me, but the corpse still demands attention. I can't look at her when I speak.

"A rat. It's dead now."

"What's so special about a dead rat in a gutter?"

"Nothing."

We stand in the bitter chill, looking at the rat together, a perverted funeral with only two attendees. She shifts on her feet, attempting to stomp the creeping ice away.

"It's fucking freezing. C'mon."

"I don't want to leave it here." The sentiment sounds stupid coming out of my mouth.

"Where else would it go?"

I have no answer for this question. Instead, I change the subject.

"Rats feel pain too."

As her yarn mittens gently envelop my brittle fingers, I realize I forgot my gloves inside.

"Dead rats don't. He's out of his misery."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes." She squeezes my hands, and I feel the hot, painful rush of blood reentering my capillaries. It burns, but it helps. She speaks again, gently. "Let's go home."

She leads me to the car, and I picture the rat with a halo and wings, its ugliness now somehow sacred. The burn itches with the beginnings of a scab as an orange dawn bleeds into the ashen morning sky.





# AVA LEEGE

*[O·ver·grown]*

ATTIC SALT • 2024

## POETRY

Ava is a senior nursing major at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. She works on a burn unit as a nursing assistant in her free time, and she hopes to become a critical care nurse when she graduates. In addition to her passion for healthcare, she has always loved creative writing. In both nursing and writing, Ava loves that she can see and explore the human experience. As a nurse, she gets to see the pain and joy of what it is to be human. As a writer, she gets to try to illuminate the depth of human life and emotion. Ava hopes to continue to pursue writing after graduation.

## [O·ver·grown]

/ˌōvər'grōn/  
*adjective*

1. I've thought a lot about the ways love spills from us. It falls from our fingertips like seeds in the wind. Spend enough time with someone, and their roots become indistinguishable from yours.
2. Peel back my skin and you will find the roots of everyone I've ever loved. Vines of ivy twist their way around the white picket fence of my bones. Wildflowers sprout from under my fingernails. I breathe in, and dandelion seeds float into my lungs. I'm covered in weeds, tangled in love.
3. It's beautiful, really, that we grow so much into each other. My phone password is still the initials of my elementary school crush. I build sandcastles the way my great-uncle taught me to. I think like my father and talk like my mother. The songs that I love most are sent to me by friends who loved them first.
4. It would be impossible to uproot the eyes that have become planted in my soul. The gardens that are eternally intertwined with mine.
5. Our bodies are bouquets of love collected from other people. Love overgrown.

# NATHAN KUCZMARSKI

*[Snap]*

ATTIC SALT • 2024

FILM

Nathan KuczmarSKI is a sophomore film and television production major at Loyola Marymount University. He enjoys challenging commonly held beliefs, analyzing life until 4:30 a.m. and occasionally engaging in whimsy.



*Snap*

# LAURA CLARK

*[Embodiment, Identity, and Moral  
Responsibility in the Metaverse]*

ATTIC SALT • 2024

## ESSAY

Laura is a senior at Santa Clara University studying Philosophy and Religious Studies. At a young age, she began asking “why” to many things – why do some people have to sleep in tents on the side of the street, why did that man say “that word” about the woman at his side, and why are people who work so hard unable to pursue what interests them? This simple three-letter word defines her curiosity about the world and led her to pursue philosophy and ethics more specifically. After moving to Silicon Valley from her hometown of Durango Colorado, she became aware of the new ethical questions posed by emerging technologies. She is grateful for the incredible faculty at SCU for fostering her passion and drive to grapple with these difficult questions.

## ***[Embodiment, Identity, and Moral Responsibility in the Metaverse]***

Extended reality is increasing in popularity. Apple just released a new VR experience marketed to blend digital content with physical space. Other iterations of virtual and augmented reality are in the works as people continue to explore the potential of simulated reality, unhindered by the laws of nature. As technologies become increasingly embedded within our physical spaces and new opportunities arise, ethical implications also emerge. Some view advancing technologies through a largely optimistic lens. They see advancements as innovations that give us the potential to maximize utility and possibly break down some of the restraints that hinder human progress. Conversely, some are more cautious in accepting the wide-ranging possibilities of these new technologies, saying that they imbue harmful values or may even threaten to diminish or eliminate what makes human life innately valuable. Drawing on the work of Peter-Paul Verbeek, this paper argues that technologies are not value neutral. Through a discussion of the ethical implications of extended reality technologies on human embodiment, I will assert that creators and users must recognize the role of technology as a moral mediator, reflecting on whether the intense integration of simulated environments with physical environments is ultimately beneficial or promotes human flourishing. I will first outline the significant aspects of embodiment within the metaverse, discussing the potential for bodily modification, use of multiple avatars, and self-identification with one's avatar. Next, I will examine the issues of identity and moral responsibility within the metaverse. I claim that while there are potential ways to address these issues, none is fully satisfactory. Lastly, I apply proposed ethical solutions to the movie *eXistenZ*.

To understand better the relationship between technologies and our moral decision making let's consider Verbeek's example – the obstetric ultrasound. Before ultrasound technology, people had to wait to see their babies until they were born, envisioning the baby's body, gender, and health through fully intangible means. This all changed with the invention of the ultrasound. With this technology, parents had the capacity to see a concrete visual of their baby, humanizing it and revealing things like gender and birth defects. Verbeek argues that “this technology is not merely a neutral interface between expecting parents and their unborn child: it helps to constitute what this child is for its parents and what the parents are in relation to their child” (78). In this way, the ultrasound technology translates the baby as a possible patient. Consider the scenario in which parents found out that their unborn baby had a massive pulmonary hemorrhage. This disease would likely result in premature birth, the possibility of abnormal bloodflow, and bleeding problems that could result in the baby's death soon after birth. The parents now face a moral dilemma: whether they should have the child. This dilemma would've never occurred without the ultrasound. The parents envision their child's future. Verbeek explains that “while moral agency is not inherent in things, moral agency is the outcome of complex interactions between humans and things” (80). This emphasizes the reflexive nature of technology in which we embed our values within it and yet it shapes our values through its creation and implementation.

Now let us examine this within the context of extended reality (XR). To understand the ethics involved with virtual embodiment we must first lay out the most important aspects of embodiment within the metaverse.

Embodiment refers to the state of being “embodied”. While physical embodiment is a way of understanding an individual’s self through their physical body, XR embodiment is conceptualized similarly but in a technologically mediated way. In the case of an avatar, someone is virtually embodied as their character. A significant aspect of virtual embodiment includes the potential for bodily modification. Within XR, the possibilities to alter your appearance are vast with a range of expression and malleability. From placing yourself within the embodiment of a character in a game or simply altering your appearance as a form of self-expression, there are many ways in which someone can be virtually represented. Ramirez notes that bodies are “vehicles through which we understand ourselves and our social interactions” (Ramirez, “XR” 5). This becomes tricky when recognizing the social forces that impact bodily modification and how the potential for bodily modification affects interactions within the physical world. Take, for example, issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Someone who is largely discriminated against based on their racial identity within the physical world may be inclined to alter their racial presentation within XR. At the same time, the way that people interact with their virtual body and become largely attached to it triggers psychological effects. Consider another example. Someone who biologically presents as male in the physical world may feel that they identify more truly as a woman. Therefore, when choosing how to present in XR spaces, they embody themselves as a female. Since they identify more closely with their female embodiment, XR can serve as a space to express themselves. Although, this attachment to their virtually embodied self can become strong so that when they reenter physical reality, they experience disorientation. Thus, the norms that impact one’s decision to present a certain way within XR are directly related to norms within the physical world.

Extended reality also allows for the continued alteration of one’s embodiment or the creation of multiple avatars. The freedom of a user in their capacity to modify or create their embodied experience relies on those who create and own the extended reality technology. Therefore, corporate interests can inform what is and is not allowed in the realm of body modification such as whether the technology permits for people to add disabilities such as paralysis or an amputated leg as part of their virtual embodiment. The virtual space itself may be public, private, or semi-private, which will impact the protections and freedoms allowed within the space. Questions arise regarding whether things such as property rights should be treated as analogous to physical space. New forms of social interaction become available with XR environments including recreation, gaming, or virtual representations of touristic areas (Ramirez, “XR” 6). I think it is also significant to point out how XR transforms the subject-object distinction. Different from how a person uses a hammer, an object distinctly separate from the human person and utilized for the purpose of the human agent, extended reality integrates subject and object within one another. Therefore, as Verbeek highlights, “the intentions are the product of a hybrid entity, half human, half technology. Blurring the physical boundaries between humans and technologies also results in the blurring of intentional boundaries” (84). One’s behavior must be understood not as fully autonomous but mediated by the technology and its values.

Now I will discuss two major philosophical issues that XR embodiment prompts: the problems of identity and moral responsibility within the metaverse. Starting with identity, there are a few things to consider. XR allows someone to have both a physical embodiment as well as a simulated

one. Research by Freeman suggests that “our physical embodiment can affect how we create and shape AR (augmented reality) bodies and that how we are embodied in AR can cause us to rethink our relationships to our physical bodies” (Ramirez, “Extended” 110). Take, for example, someone who is short within the real world. They decide to make their avatar a foot taller than their physical embodiment. Leaving the virtual environment, they experience a sort of dysmorphia, causing distress. Additionally, Freeman notes that “users embodied in XR spaces can come to feel a very real sense of identity with their XR bodies and can even feel as if those bodies are a part of their real or authentic selves” (Ramirez, “XR” 3). Ramirez adds that many people experience virtual bodies as being as real to them as their physical bodies. People not only control their avatar from a first-person point of view but are connected with their virtual environment. Because they are so immersed within the technology, they become almost inseparable. This is heightened by the fact that hardware elements, especially full body tracking, enable not only presence and virtually real experiences but also the experience of XR embodiment, allowing people to actually experience sensation. Forms of digital erasure also become a reality when companies limit the traits available for XR embodiment. Take for example the case of missing limbs. Someone may have a missing leg and they consider this physical reality part of their self or identity. Companies may not consider this or prioritize it as a trait that people would want to add to their virtual avatars. In not including the option to be virtually embodied without a leg, this identity is erased from the virtual environment. The sense of identity with XR embodiment can go so far as to make the user “consider altering their physical bodies in order to better represent their authentic self” (Ramirez, “XR” 5). Just as on social media, people have the capacity to create personas and live virtual lives that may differ significantly from their physical ones yet are so immersive that they start to see themselves through their virtual identity. Bodies uphold values about sex, sexuality, and embodied aesthetics. XR harassment threatens to erase the identities of Black, Brown, disabled, and non-binary individuals (Ramirez, “XR” 12). Thus, XR embodiment causes many aspects of identity issues to result.

Now let’s examine the issue of moral responsibility by considering the possibility for sexual harassment in XR spaces. The opportunities opened up by XR alter the ways in which people interact in both simulated and physical worlds. While in the physical world, people are subject to their body, which remains connected to the self and can be tracked; in XR, there are limitless ways to be embodied, making it extremely difficult to track the self. As noted before, XR permits the creation of multiple avatars, the ability to alter one’s avatar at any moment, and through haptics, the potential to create presence and virtually real experiences. First, let us define what harassment may look like in XR. Ramirez says that “haptic harassment happens when a user’s haptic feedback devices are hacked by other users in order to non-consensually touch someone because haptic feedback can directly and physically stimulate the user” (Ramirez, “XR” 10). Also, users who identify themselves closely with their avatar have expressed the sensation of a sort of phantom touch. Another user may therefore harass through words or virtual embodied touch that elicits sensation from the other user. To understand this, consider a case in which someone called another user a derogatory name and shoved them. This would be considered a form of harassment which could be prosecuted on the basis of harassment in the real world. Because this occurred in XR, the perpetrator could simply



change their user's appearance, making it nearly impossible to hold them accountable for their actions. There is no way to track or enforce this and punish or provide consequences. XR spaces will likely breed these types of interactions. On top of that, Ramirez explains that it becomes increasingly difficult to know whether you are interacting with a human or a bot ("XR" 6). This problematizes the idea of consent as we must consider whether human-like bots give or receive consent. Ultimately the capacity to hold users morally responsible for their conduct within XR remains difficult due to the extensive abilities to alter one's XR embodiment without tracking.

Next, I will lay out some possible ways that these ethical issues could be addressed. To begin, I assert that we must acknowledge that "technologies help to shape how we act and live" and that moral questions get answered "not only on the basis of the input of human beings but also of nonhuman entities" (Verbeek 77-78). Following Verbeek, I argue that XR technologies mediate our moral decision-making by directing us in a particular way towards our environment; in this case, they position us toward connecting with our virtual bodies and decreasing the consequences for acts that would be considered immoral within the physical world. Concerning issues of identity, there are not many comprehensive ways to address these issues. One possibility could include the requirement that users take an initial training course on the effects of virtual embodiment which must be completed to unlock the virtual world. In doing so, people are at least exposed to the potential harms involved with avatar creation, interaction in XR worlds, and recognizing risks of engaging in these spaces, but this would simply attempt to foster the integrity of the user without placing any constraints on virtual embodiment. Companies, states, or individuals could control bodily modifications. If corporations are tasked with regulation, profit-driven values and competition could cloud their judgment regarding the ethics of these spaces. Ramirez emphasizes that "the imperative to maximize shareholder value drives social XR spaces," leaving them subject to corruption (Ramirez, "Extended" 114). An alternative would be state control. This option obtains the benefits of its commitment to procedural fairness as well as the fact that states are already empowered to regulate physical embodiment through laws of decency (Ramirez, "Extended" 114). Laws including those of abortion regulation, gender confirmation, and cosmetic surgeries prompt wide-ranging disagreements even in state regulation of the physical world (Ramirez, "Extended" 114). These would likely appear around debates of virtual embodiment, failing to fully address the ethical issues discussed above. Verbeek argues that "the mediating role of technologies in moral actions and decisions cannot be entirely reduced to the intentions of designers and users, after all; some moral mediations emerge without the explicit intention of any human agent" (Verbeek 82). Through this we understand that even if the designer or user had a particular aim or motive in the creation or participation in the technology, there are unforeseeable consequences. This can be exemplified by the original intent for Facebook. Facebook was originally meant to connect Harvard students with one another. When it was expanded and users began to connect with old classmates, friends, and distant family, the unintended effects of the spread of misinformation, stalking, and corporate advertisement emerged.

Regarding the problem of moral responsibility there are a few proposed solutions. The first is the incorporation of biomarkers such as that of a fingerprint or facial recognition technology. This would tie you to your avatar, tracking your virtual body and assisting in the verification of

your identity, taking the stance that the self and the physical body are in fact the same. The use of biomarkers negates any possibility that the relationship between the self and the natal or unenhanced body could be in contention. To avoid these possibly problematic assumptions about the self and identity, non-fungible tokens (NFTs) have also been considered (Ramirez, “Extended” 118). These are a sort of private key linking the person to their virtual identity, one example being bitcoin. NFT’s could serve as a way to track users to regulate virtual spaces and is a stable way of marking identity. One difficulty of NFT’s emerges from the fact that they are not connected to the user in any way other than their ownership of it, making it possible to trade NFTs between users. This means that NFTs are not an infallible way to ensure moral responsibility. Specifically, regarding sexual harassment, there are already limitations with current conceptions of sexual harassment in the physical world, making it difficult to regulate or find ways to approach problems of moral responsibility in a virtual setting.

I will now apply these proposed solutions to eXistenZ, a movie depicting a virtual world that is almost indistinguishable from reality. In the movie, you must complete tasks that spur “character” urges that seem embodied and almost instinctual. To enter the virtual world, you must get a “bioport” put in your body. A lot of biological and sexual imagery is used to show the blurred lines between physical reality and virtual experiences that feel particularly real. I argue that a policy requiring the use of biomarkers should be enacted to attempt to track identity and the actions of human agents within these spaces to hold them accountable. For example, Ted Pikul, one of the main characters, shoots and kills a waiter in a restaurant because he thinks it is an imperative of the game. In another scene, Ted and Allegra Geller, the supposed creator of the eXistenZ game, engage in sexual acts which are brushed off as “urges of their characters”. By requiring a biomarker, it would make concrete who entered the XR embodiment and therefore connect a person to nonconsensual or psychologically detrimental acts such as harassment or virtual killing. Additionally, I would opt for state regulation of the eXistenZ world. One of the main plot lines is that Allegra Geller’s pod, which contains the original game of eXistenZ, is damaged. This has consequences both inside the game as well as in the “physical” world. By implementing state regulation of XR spaces in the same way that embodiment is regulated in physical spaces such as the requirement to wear a shirt and shoes to enter an establishment, states can set norms that promote the safety of virtual spaces by setting a baseline order.

Overall, I have illustrated the significant aspects of XR embodiment including bodily modification, control and regulation over XR spaces, the ability to track self, identity, and understanding moral decision-making when technology plays a mediating role. I described how problems of identity can arise through the vast possibilities of bodily modification, strong identification with one’s virtual body, and the intermixing of subject and object within XR environments. Through the case study of sexual harassment within the metaverse, I identified the ethical implications of moral responsibility due to the malleable nature of virtual embodiment, the inability to track users, and the creation of presence through haptics technology. Presenting multiple methods to address ethical issues of identity such as corporate or state regulation, I concluded that neither were fully satisfactory options, having their own pitfalls. Concerning the issue of moral responsibility, I posed the solutions of biomarkers and NFTs, each harboring their own risks. Applying these to the movie eXistenZ, I

argued for the incorporation of state regulation and biomarkers. I ultimately agree with Verbeek that “technological artifacts should, indeed, be located in the realm of moral agency: moral agency cannot be understood without taking into account how it takes shape through technological mediations” (Verbeek 78). As the XR landscape continues to advance we must contemplate carefully the potential moral implications before immersing ourselves within these spaces.

## Works Cited

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