



Artwork by Melanie Sosis



# Distinctions: An Honors Student Journal

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## **Distinctions: An Honors Student Journal**

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Behavioral Sciences

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The artwork on the cover, by Melanie Sosis, was developed from a photograph of the fountain in the center of the circular drive in front of the college.

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We were elated by the response to the first issue of *Distinctions* and we are equally excited to present Volume 1: Number 2. The response in terms of student papers and new faculty advisors over the winter module and during the spring term was tremendous. This has resulted in a much more selective journal: the acceptance rate for papers in this issue was fifty percent.

Many people helped produce this issue in a myriad of ways. Most importantly, the students whose work appears herein represent our highest hopes and most serious ambitions as a college. Especially Co-Editors, Sonia Valentin and Aline Bernstein, who have continued to serve as Student Editors have been invaluable partners in the founding, editing, and production of *Distinctions*. During the spring, they continued to offer to their ideas, time, energy, dedication, and talent beyond all expectations. Ms. Valentin and Ms. Bernstein represent the very best our college has to offer. The student editors were joined this semester by Denise Kim, who aided immensely in the reading and editing of student papers. It has been an honor and a privilege to work with all three of them.

Without the faculty mentors, these papers could not have been written and/or composed, and I thank each of them for supporting the students and the journal. Other faculty and administrative staff have also provided invaluable assistance toward the publication of *Distinctions*: Professor Judith Wilde, responded with support and practical judgment in the selection of our cover design; Professor Olga Mezhibovskaya, mentored Melanie Sosis, the student whose art work appears on the cover; Mr. Joseph Tammany and the Office Services staff produce the journal under much time pressure; and each member of the Faculty Advisory Committee has been available for advice and support. We especially thank Dr. Eric Willner who shared in the founding of the journal and Dean Reza Fakhari, who has wholeheartedly and enthusiastically supported this journal from its beginnings. His energy, dedication, and wisdom has become a source of inspiration for all of us at KCC, and nowhere is this influence more prominent than in the production of *Distinctions*.

We are very pleased that this issue contains a disproportionate number of ESL student papers, and we are proud of their accomplishments at the college. We have published for the first time a paper from an ESL 91 student, nominated by the ESL faculty. The other ESL students whose papers appear herein succeeded in entering the Honors Option Program and this issue features their achievements in writing. We hope that you will enjoy reading Volume 1, Number 2 of *Distinctions* and that in it you will find inspiration for your own nonfiction writing and your work with students.

Dr. Barbara Walters  
Faculty Mentor and Editor  
*Distinctions: An Honors Student Journal*  
May 2006



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*He had confidence, he felt power and joy and he held his mother in contempt. He resented that she befriended the Jewish people in Burgdorf and eventually he reported her to the Nazis.*

***Stones from the River:***  
**The Germans and the Holocaust**

Aline Bernstein  
English 66H  
Fall 2005  
Mentor: Professor Loretta Kasper

**“That which does not kill me, makes me stronger.” – Nietzsche**

This paper will focus on the novel Stones from the River, by Ursula Hegi. Stones from the River is a fabulous work, filled with complex and well-drawn characters. Hegi gives a heart-rending account of what Germany was like from the end of World War I through and including the rise of Hitler, the Nazis and World War II. This paper will also question why the German people acted the way they did and what motivated them. The story that unfolds in the fictional town of Burgdorf will be compared with what actually happened historically.

There are many explanations for the conduct of the German people. After World War I Germany had to pay restoration; Germany had to declare its guilt for promoting the war; Germany had to give back territories; Germany’s ‘nationalistic’ pride had been wounded; the Weimar Republic was weak and ineffective and there was great unemployment. In addition to all of this, inflation was tremendously high and the 1929 world-wide depression plunged the country into further unrest.

Throughout history, anti-Semitism has always run rampant. Whenever there were great catastrophes, such as the Black Plague, Europeans always blamed the Jews. In 1918 the German people could not believe that their country had lost the war and they needed a scapegoat. Hitler himself blamed the Jews: “In the year 1916-17 nearly the whole production was under the control of Jewish finance. The spider was slowly beginning to suck the blood out of the peoples’ pores” (Dawidowicz, 46).

Adolf Hitler was an opportunist who was in the right place at the right time. He was born in Vienna and from a very young age was extremely anti-Semitic. He never lied about his intentions concerning the Jewish people. His autobiography, Mein Kampf, was written in 1923-24 while he was in prison and in it Hitler vented his rage at the Jews. Hitler believed that most Germans were anti-Semitic anyway and he knew that at the appropriate time and with the proper words he would be able to make this work to his advantage.

“In no sense was Hitler’s monumental, indeed world-historical, decision - driven as it was by his fervent hatred of Jews - to exterminate European Jewry an historical accident, as some have argued, that took place because other options were closed off to him or because of something as ephemeral as Hitler’s moods. Killing was not undertaken by Hitler reluctantly. Killing, biological purgation, was for Hitler a natural, preferred method of solving problems.

Indeed, killing was Hitler's reflex. He slaughtered those in his own movement whom he saw as a challenge. He killed his political enemies. He killed Germany's mentally ill. Already in 1929, he publicly toyed with the idea of killing all German children born with physical defects, which he numbered in a murderously megalomaniacal movement of fantasy at 700,000 to 800,000 a year. Surely, death was the most fitting penalty for the Jews. A demonic nation deserves nothing less than death" (Goldhagen, 423).

Leonard Peikoff in The Ominous Parallels goes even further. He says: "Germany was ideologically ripe for Hitler. The intellectual groundwork had been prepared. The country's ideas - a certain special category of ideas - were ready" (Peikoff, 22). In this book, Peikoff refers specifically to the ideas of Kant and Hegel. Kant said that duty is the most important thing - a selfless, lifelong obedience to duty. Hegel believed that if a state claimed a person's life, the individual must surrender it. Anything of worth a human being possessed was only through the state. "The Nazi collectivism, technically, is a form of racism rather than of nationalism. But the Nazis were able to combine the two doctrines easily by the device of holding that Germany contains the purest Aryan blood" (Peikoff, 40).

Hitler had two main obsessions: Jews and the 'Master Race.' He wanted Germans with blonde hair and blue eyes to breed a race of 'pure Aryans' that would last for centuries. These people would be the 'Master Race.' All the other breeds, especially the Jews, could be damned. Yet if that was the case, then Hitler himself could not be 'pure Aryan' because he was dark and ugly. An authority in 'racial' biology described Hitler as "...face and head: bad race, mongrel. Low, receding forehead, ugly nose, broad cheekbones, small eyes, dark hair; facial expression, not of a man commanding with full self-control, but betraying insane excitement. Finally, an expression of blissful egotism" (Dawidowicz, 4).

**Question:** Is it not strange that no one in Germany ever questioned these ironies? A man who was not even born in Germany insisting that "Germany is only for Germans." A man who was dark in coloring insisting that only blonde and blue-eyed people could be 'true Aryans', the 'Master Race.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Having now provided a historical context, I would like to focus on the novel and Burgdorf, a small town in Germany. The main character in the novel is Trudi, and it is she who relates all the events. Trudi was born a zwerg, a dwarf, and from the very first she was considered as different, an outsider. Toward the end of the book Trudi describes what it was like to be a dwarf: "Being a zwerg means carrying your deepest secret inside

out – there for everyone to see” (Hegi, 382). It is heartbreaking how Trudi tries to ‘will’ herself to grow by hanging from the doorframe of her room.

As she grew up Trudi took advantage of being a zwerg. People felt superior because of her size, but this only made Trudi stronger. She was surrounded by people but inside her was an intense loneliness because she believed that she was apart and that there was no one else like her. She wanted so much to be accepted by the people of the town. Their feelings only enforced further her desire to be wanted. Maybe because she was an outcast and deformed, she was able to develop ‘insight’ and learn secrets from the townspeople. She could look at them and practically tell what they were thinking. It is also very interesting to speculate on why author Hegi made the character of Trudi a dwarf. Perhaps to reinforce the fact that Trudi, as an outcast and an outsider, was able to have so much sympathy for the Jews. They were outsiders and apart from society also, just as she was.

Trudi turned to nature and books for pleasure and to be nurtured. She loved the river. When she was thirteen a terrible thing happened to her. She went to the river early, through the mist that she loved, and immersed herself in the water. She heard voices nearby and saw four boys from the town, Paul, Hans-Jurgen, Fritz and Georg, frolicking naked. Georg was her friend, the only young person in the town who spent time with her; most of the others, especially the girls, ignored her. When the boys discovered her, they showed incredible cruelty. They dragged her back to a barn and raped her. It is a very disturbing scene and it marked Trudi for life even further. But one of the worst things was that her good friend, Georg, did nothing. He stood by and watched.

“Georg did not touch her. Hands jammed into his pockets like pieces of wood, he stood to the side, ready to flee, and once, when his eyes let themselves be trapped by Trudi’s they were wild with anger at her – for letting herself get caught” (Hegi, 149).

But Trudi, despite her afflictions and despite her cruel lot in life, proved to be very resilient. With all her anguish and hardship and resentments which sometimes bordered on hatred, Trudi found a place for herself. She met one other dwarf, Pia, who worked in a circus. Pia talked to Trudi about being different and about loneliness: “No one but you can change that” (Hegi, 220). Trudi did not understand then, but later on she remembered Pia’s words and hugged herself, finally embracing her own body, accepting who she was. “The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity – even under the most difficult circumstances – to add a deeper meaning to his life” (Frankl, 88).

Trudi was lucky because she had a wonderful, tender, kind and very loving father. Leo Montag is a most endearing character. He never in any way rejected his daughter. He told her she was perfect as is. Since Trudi's mother died when she was only four years old, Leo nurtured Trudi. He did not treat her as if she were a freak in any way, but rather he accepted and loved her without question. He was extremely goodhearted and good-natured. Leo had a deep sadness in him, yet he was able to go on and help others, including many Jews who were on the run from the Nazis. "The salvation of man is through love and in love" (Frankl, 5).

**Question:** How can people change in an instant? People lived together in a small town, side by side for many years. They visited each other, they ate together, and they knew each other very well. There were always petty jealousies and annoyances, but for the most part there was no trouble. Most likely a lot of anti-Semitism existed, but it was kept hidden. It was not openly discussed. Then Hitler and the Nazis came to power. Suddenly, almost overnight, people felt that they could let out all their anger. Why? Did they really hate Jews that much? Were they showing off for the Nazis, who had inhabited their town, hoping to incur favors from them? Did this feeling of being so powerful drive them to do horrible deeds? Didn't they realize that they themselves lost so much of their own freedoms?

"Only a few of the people in Burgdorf had read Mein Kampf, and many thought that all this talk about *Rassenreinheit* - purity of the race - was ludicrous and impossible to enforce. Yet the long training in obedience to elders, government and church made it difficult - even for those who considered the view of the Nazis dishonorable - to give voice to their misgiving. And so they kept hushed, yielding to each new indignity while they waited for the Nazis and their ideas to go away, but with every compliance they relinquished more of themselves, weakening the texture of the community while the power of the Nazis swelled" (Hegi, 207).

In The Dilemma of Obedience, Stanley Milgram describes an experiment he conducted at Yale University in the 1970's. He wanted to see how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another ordinary citizen because he was "instructed" to do so. The subject is told that the experiment involved learning and he or she was to be the "teacher." A confederate aids during the experiment as the "learner." The "learner" was strapped into a chair and the subject was instructed to read simple word pairs and to test the "learner" on his ability to repeat the second word after he heard the first. If the "learner" made an error, the subject was instructed to administer electric shocks of increasing intensity for each wrong answer given. The subject was placed before a generator and shown a switch ranging from 14 to 450 volts. The goal of the experiment

was to see how far the subject acting as the “teacher” would go in administering shocks to the “learner.” Milgram’s findings were amazing. At times the “learner” would cry out pretending to be in pain. However, even if the “teacher” hesitated and wanted to stop, the experimenter told him he must continue. Often the subject, in his role as “teacher,” administered shocks which, if real, would have been lethal, simply because he did not want to appear disobedient. Milgram’s conclusion was that by doing their jobs, ordinary people who might not harbor any particular hatred would definitely participate in harmful procedures and would be loathe to question or resist authority. To compensate for what they had done, these subjects transferred all responsibility to the experimenter.

Still, even if all this were true and ordinary people in Germany took part in repugnant deeds, perhaps against their will, to please the authorities and also to save their own skin, the viciousness and sadistic glee with which some people performed these tasks is horrific and inexcusable.

“A train passed through Burgdorf on its way to another camp because the Americans were getting close. Many townspeople stood at a distance, watching. Suddenly, the third-youngest Buttgereit daughter, Bettina flying from the restraining hands of her sisters toward the train, thrusting the half loaf of bread that she’d just traded from Frau Bilder for an embroidered purse, toward one of the half-open windows of the train. Several gaunt hands tried to clutch the bread, but before any could seize it, four SS men closed around Bettina Buttgereit, their black uniforms one impenetrable knot that absorbed her pale coat and rendered her invisible until they disentangled. Bettina between them, they thrust her toward the train. (Hegi, 442-43).

Another episode was “...about a bank clerk only four blocks away who’d been forced to take off her clothes and then had been beaten with rifle butts for giving two hard-boiled eggs to her Jewish neighbor who’d been about to be deported.” (Hegi, 333).

Helmut Eberhardt, a very young man at the time, became caught up in the frenzy and glamour of Hitler. Helmut was an only child and from the time of his birth he belittled his mother and took advantage of her. She doted on him but the more she did for him, the more he tormented her. He joined the Hitler- Jugend and became completely transformed. He was a new person. He had confidence, he felt power and joy and he held his mother in contempt. He resented that she befriended the Jewish people in Burgdorf and eventually he reported her to the Nazis. She was taken away, never to return. There was a great streak of cruelty in him. He hated the Jews with a passion and loved to torture them. He felt strongly that they should all be killed. Definitely and without doubt, he is the personification of evil, a frightening and despicable human being.

“People must be motivated to kill others, or else they would not do so” (Goldhagen, 24). Goldhagen further contends that “ordinary” German citizens not only agreed with Hitler, but actually participated in his plan. “The cruelty demonstrated that Germany’s treatment of the Jews could in no traditional way be moral, certainly not in any ‘Christian’ sense of the term. Only in the framework of the new Nazi Germany morality could the perpetrators have believed themselves to be engaged in just action” (Goldhagen, 389).

On Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, the Nazis came to Burgdorf. Many in the town believed it could never happen to them, but only in the big cities. They thought that if they ‘ignored’ what was happening, then maybe it would all go away.

“It is often said that the German people were “indifferent” to the fate of the Jews. Those who claim this typically ignore the vast number of ordinary Germans who contributed to the eliminationist program, even to its exterminationist aspects, and those many more Germans who at one time or another demonstrated their concurrence with the prevailing cultural cognitive model of the Jews or showed enthusiasm for their country’s anti-Jewish measures, such as the approximately 100,000 people in Nuremberg alone, who, with obvious approval, attended a rally on the day after Kristallnacht which celebrated the night’s events. How could Germans have been “indifferent” – in the sense of having no views or predilections on the matter, in the sense of feeling no emotions, of being utterly neutral, morally and in every other way – to the mass slaughter of thousands of people, including children, which the people themselves or their countrymen were helping to perpetrate in their name?” (Goldhagen, 439).

One of the most chilling passages in Stones from the River is stated succinctly in this excerpt: “Someone started the *Horst Wessel* song, and several others blared along: ‘*Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt...*’ ‘*When the Jew blood spurts from the knife...*’ A woman carrying a small child pointed toward the higher flames, her smile excited. Two Hitler Youths waved their flags. Trudi looked at the faces of the people around her; most of them she’d known all her life. Maybe now, she thought, now in the blaze of this fire, they surely will have to see. But it was as if they’d come to take the horrible for granted, mistaking it for the ordinary” (Hegi, 269).

Trudi and her father never wavered in their support of their Jewish friends. They hid Jews in the basement even though their own lives were in danger. When the war was over, when the Americans marched into Germany and to the small town of Burgdorf, people refused to think about what had taken place. They only wanted to focus on the good things, not relive the past and they refused to talk about it. Reports of towns where concentration camps were located were dismissed as false rumors. The people did not

want to believe the camps were death camps. They called them only work camps.

“They did not understand why Trudi Montag wanted to dig in the dirt, as they called it, didn’t understand that for her it had nothing to do with dirt but with the need to bring out the truth and never forget it. Not that she liked to remember any of it, but she understood that – whatever she knew about what had happened – would be with her from now on, and that no one could escape the responsibility of having lived in this time” (Hegi, 450).

\* \* \* \* \*

**Question:** Why did the Germans not protest? Why did they accept Hitler so willingly?

The rise of Nazism and the Holocaust were not just the work of one man. The majority of German people chose to vote for the Nazi party. They chose to accept what Hitler was doing. When one looks at historical live footage of Hitler addressing crowds in Berlin, one sees hundreds of thousands of screaming Germans ecstatically cheering their Fuehrer with arms extended. When Hitler rode through the streets in his car, frenzied mobs tried to get close enough to touch him. They treated him like a messiah. When synagogues were torched, when stores and businesses were destroyed, when Jews were rounded up and beaten and eventually taken away, the Germans did not protest. They did nothing! By keeping silent, by doing nothing, they became accomplices. Even after the war they kept silent.

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (Frankl, 86).

Trudi will have the last word in this paper since she is the main character in Stones From the River. Dear Trudi, with her remarkable insight, would look at the returning German soldiers and silently wonder to herself what they personally had done in the war. “And what did you do in the war? And you? And you?” (Hegi, 449).

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*LeWitt utilized a palette entirely of saturated primary and secondary colors, while Christo and Jeanne-Claude chose to make their statement using an exciting neon saffron fabric hanging from, or attached to, strong rectangular frames.*

## **Minimalism and Math to Swirls and Twirls: The Transformation of Sol LeWitt**

By Lily Montemarano  
Art 34  
Fall, 2005  
Mentor: Professor Caterina Pierre

**S**plotch # 3 is a painted sculpture by Sol LeWitt made of fiberglass, painted with acrylic and created in the year 2000. Although it is a part of the LeWitt Collection in Chester, Connecticut, I saw this piece on the roof top of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This sculpture is truly eye-catching, and stood out quite spectacularly on the gray and drab day when I visited the Museum. When my boyfriend and I got off the elevator at the museum's roof top, we were bombarded with the overwhelmingly bright colors that decorate these very smooth, sensually shaped sculptures. They were absolutely magnificent and against the stark background, the colors seemed to glow.

Splotch # 3 was a part of a group of five sculptures in a series, not to mention a wall drawing that echoed similar principles of the sculptures. Each piece had a "Splotch" and number. Although the title is not very creative, it did not take away from the piece at all. In fact, later I learned that it has to do with LeWitt's interest in sequence. The sculpture is situated against the edge of the roof top with the long Manhattan skyline stretched out behind it. The piece is propped up on a white box about three feet tall and about thirteen feet long. The structure itself, although varying in height and depth, has an average height of roughly three feet and has about the same panoramic width.

The only way to really describe this piece is to say that it reminded me of candle wax dripping. Picture thousands of brightly colored candles and wax crayons all melting together. The main colors are primary and secondary. The primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) are thought to be the three main and most pure colors. By mixing pairs of the primary colors you will arrive at the secondary colors (orange, green, and purple). The melting colors seem to form cities, shapes, and empires. It has so much fluidity to it that these shapes almost appear to be moving when you look at it.

The long cylindrical like shapes seems to mimic, and at the same time contradict, the silhouette of the city skyline behind it. This sculpture is full of curves and motion that is similar to the varying heights and widths of the buildings but different in that they lack the same curvature that Splotch # 3 possesses. As well as the skyline complimenting the piece, the tree tops and organic shapes of the park add even more visual stimulation. LeWitt's work winds up, down, in and out with the force of a roller coaster. The outside lines are clearly and strongly defined, yet it is a very playful piece of art that radiates energy. People posed to take pictures, children reached out to touch, and others peered through holes to see who might be on the other side.

The placement of this sculpture is extremely important. I like that it is currently located in an open area rather than an enclosed room. It appears vital that it is placed in front of the Manhattan skyline and Central Park. It suggests that the artist is trying to

emulate a city or make an important connection or point between the two. If I had seen this somewhere indoors I probably would not have had the same reaction and enjoyment.

As I stood on this rooftop, my mind's eye took me back to January of 2005, when I had the unique opportunity of being an intern at the temporary art installation of The Gates at Central Park in New York City, a happening created by the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude. Some people might ask: "What does one have to do with the other?" They might even consider them to be total opposites, thinking that LeWitt's piece is stationary, while The Gates were constantly moving, but I would beg to differ.

My interpretation is that they actually do have a lot in common. These two pieces once shared the panoramic view of the city and Central Park as their backdrop. LeWitt utilized a palette entirely of saturated primary and secondary colors, while Christo and Jeanne-Claude chose to make their statement using an exciting neon saffron fabric hanging from, or attached to, strong rectangular frames. The contrast of Le Witt's bold colors and shapes seemed to animate his art in much the same way that the daring, orange fabric came alive with the wind. Neither was ever standing still; they were living, breathing expressions of their creators. They both possessed movement, whether through wind or suggestive shapes and strategic placement of colors.

During my internship at The Gates, I actually got to meet Christo and Jeanne-Claude and learned about them from the curators that I met. People from all over the world came to New York to see the massive work (over one million people viewed the work over a two week period). School children came to The Gates in droves and ran mischievously through them. The Gates were magical, playing on its surroundings and relying on the interactions and reactions it invoked.

Unlike The Gates, I knew nothing about LeWitt and I wondered if he shared the same enthusiasm and commitment to his work as Christo and Jeanne-Claude. This paper made it my mission to learn more about the artist. In particular, I want to know what motivated him to create this, how did he get started, and how did he actually build this structure. I would also like to know more about his personal and artistic history. Perhaps this could give me more insight as to how he reached this point in his career and what brought him to use the fiberglass medium. I am also curious to know more about how this piece relates to our culture and what was going on five years ago, when he completed the sculpture that may have influenced its inception.

In an effort to learn all I could, I started reading about LeWitt in books, in interviews conducted with him, and by looking at many of his past works. Subsequently, I have come to learn that he is most famous for his focus on conceptual art. Conceptual art is the idea and the development behind creating a piece of art. It is the ability to

separate the plans from the object itself, and is the type of art that is meant to speak to the intellect rather than to the eyes alone. LeWitt's personal history is very interesting and gave me an appreciation for the obstacles he faced, as well as where he is today.

LeWitt was born in 1928 in Hartford, Connecticut. His parents came to the United States during the nineteenth century from Russia and his father died when LeWitt was six years old. He was then raised by his mother and aunt, who nurtured and supported LeWitt's talent for drawing. By the time he was in high school, he was thinking about a career in art. Perhaps some of what drew LeWitt to becoming an artist was that he viewed art as a way to rebel and be an individual. The young artist pursued his interest and later attended college at Syracuse University where he received a Tiffany Grant that he spent by taking a trip to Europe. There he explored classical art, in particular frescoes and other site-specific work (Kastner 33).

In 1953, after having served in the Korean War, he moved to New York City where he made a modest living doing various design jobs. By now LeWitt had developed a style of figurative painting, a gestural way of showing the form of a human, animal or object. However, his work was declining (Kastner 33). In an interview with Jeffrey Kastner, LeWitt said "I had no idea what to do, I didn't want to do anything that had to do with the prominent art of the time, which was Abstract Expressionism. Yet I hadn't settled into a positive way of working for myself either. It was a time of searching, I wanted to get back to square one" (33).

During his time of searching, LeWitt eventually started working at the Museum of Modern Art with other young artists such as Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, Robert Mangold, and Lucy Lippard. They befriended one another and would talk about finding new alternative ways to make art. LeWitt says: "We would talk about getting back to basic things, to simple things, less emotional, more detached" (Kastner 33). The attitude expressed here can certainly explain the shift LeWitt made in his art in the coming years.

LeWitt began experimenting by making three dimensional wall reliefs made of primarily wood and canvas combined with very basic geometric shapes and strong bold colors. Using sequence appealed to him as well. He soon quit his job at the museum to concentrate on his art and by 1965 his wall reliefs developed into sculptures which he prefers to call structures (Kastner 37). These structures were based on the form of a three-dimensional open cube. Although these structures were visually stunning and complex, the core construction consisted of simple forms and ideas. "LeWitt recognized that while the underlying logic in a work may be a simple scheme set on a predictable course, the object itself is experientially unpredictable" (Fineberg 306). With these open cubes LeWitt could create scores of new patterns and sequences and so this became the principal form used throughout his career.

What separated LeWitt from the Minimalist artists of the time were the variations of his structures. LeWitt explained it best when he stated that “The basic premise of Minimalism was that the object was an end in itself, and the object-as-object was the goal. But this turned that inside out and said that it wasn’t the goal; it was the means to another end, and that end was to re-establish the idea of the content” (Kastner 37).

In 1968, LeWitt’s work evolved even further when he did a wall drawing in pencil for a New York gallery. He executed wall drawings in pencil, paint, and gouache (paint similar to watercolor, only more opaque and thicker), all the while, continuing to use geometric shapes and intricate color schemes. At the time he felt painting did not get the credit it deserved and sought to find a resolution to this. His answer was to paint two-dimensional images directly on to the wall rather than on a canvas (Kastner 37). The influence of the frescoes and the site-specific work that LeWitt admired in Europe are clearly seen here.

Another radical aspect of the art was that a LeWitt wall drawing could be made without the benefit of the artist’s hand. The wall drawings were meticulously planned according to the size of the wall and he had a team of collaborators that assisted him or that he would direct (Fineburg 306). Although this was seen as innovative, it seems to me that this has been done for centuries throughout art history. Many Renaissance painters had several assistants who would actually lay down the original drawings of a work before it was to be painted. LeWitt’s assistants followed close attention to directions given just as was done with the frescoes of the Renaissance.

When there is such great demand for one’s work, the reasoning for having others help install and create it is clearly understandable. “Yet LeWitt also recognizes the conceptual gesture implicit in having others produce his work. ‘Drawing is perceived as such a personal thing,’ he [LeWitt] says with a mischievous smile, ‘you can’t have other people doing your drawings for you, right?’” (Kastner 37)

Even though LeWitt has been striving and exploring new methods for making and developing his concepts since 1953, he continues to produce lively and thought provoking work. In the 1990’s his earlier more simplistic wall drawings evolved into forceful, vigorous bands of highly saturated color. In 1999 he painted bright acrylic colors on a group of several fiberglass objects. They were entitled Non-Geometric Forms. It seems as a signal to say that the artist was ready to move away from the geometric shapes he experimented with for so long. The “Spotches” that I described earlier grew from these Non-Geometric Forms (Pamphlet, Sol LeWitt on the Roof).

The process for creating these sculptures is complicated and precise. LeWitt starts with two sets of two-dimensional hand drawn designs that illustrate the sculptures from a birds eye view. One depicts the different color divisions and the other indicates the intended heights of each colored section. LeWitt then works with sculptor fabricator Yoshitsugo Nakama to scan and translate the drawings into his computer. With a series of software programs the two can even view a three dimensional illusion of the sculptures. Then Nakama sliced the images at two-inch intervals that are printed out and pasted to pieces of construction foam; the two-inch foam slices are then stacked and glued on top of each other. Using sandpaper and rasps, the structures are then smoothed down and later, to reinforce its strength, it is covered with epoxy resin and fiberglass. Finally, more layers of epoxy compound are applied for added smoothness, as well as, two to three coats of primer paint, three to four coats of colored acrylic paint, and six to eight coats of varnish (Pamphlet, Sol LeWitt on the Roof). The end result is fully worth this painstakingly strict process.

It is almost as if a transformation takes place, and what emerge are outstanding and unique sculptures that seem to swim and take on a movement and life of their own. Between the curvaceous and almost factory finished exterior, and the brilliantly blazing colors, they become a sort of optical illusion that fluidly yet rapidly leads your eye and stirs your mind. The elements of nature and the scenery of New York blend together; the final outcome is an overwhelming sight that somehow finds a pleasant and engaging balance with the viewer.

I believe that LeWitt would have never come to make such creations if he had not gone through the process of working and re-working his ideas. Besides being an esteemed artist, I have learned that he is also a deep thinker with a scientific way of operating. His work concentrating on cubes, grid structures, and meticulously planned wall drawings reflect his study of mathematics. One of his main goals was to strive for something new and once he found it he did not stop. By constantly pushing himself and his work to the next level he has made many breakthroughs in art and in thinking. At the age of seventy-eight he is still working and striving towards the next level.

Undoubtedly, LeWitt made a major contribution to art history with his emphasis on the idea, or notion behind a work, as being the most significant characteristic of creating. In 1967 he wrote: "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair" (LeWitt 6). I noticed that I am the total opposite of LeWitt in that most of the time; I am spontaneous and more visual. LeWitt would most likely consider my work as being perceptual, because in his words: "Art that is meant for the sensation of the eye

primarily would be called perceptual rather than conceptual. This would include most optical, kinetic, light, and color art” (6-7). I would have to say that I disagree with the cut and dry nature in which its meaning is defined. In art everything is up to the many interpretations of both artist and viewer. Though I may not always focus on concept and process before making something, I often find significance in it afterward.

Comparing and contrasting my own artistic process with that of LeWitt’s forced me to take an inventory of what I know. Primary and secondary colors and the connection between the frescos of the Renaissance to LeWitt’s wall drawings were things that I immediately recognized. There was also a striking similarity between LeWitt and the Neo-Impressionist painter, Seurat, in that they both used a very systematic and scientific method of producing art. Seurat planned his paintings with careful attention to where he placed points of color and how the eye would receive and blend them. Without this prior knowledge, it would have been difficult to notice these relationships.

Something else I learned in class is that throughout the history of art there has been a constant push and pull between reason and passion. For instance, if you look at the early and high Renaissance, and Neoclassical art, you will see one side of the spectrum that demands reasoning, uses math and science and observation. The other side of the spectrum such as Baroque, Mannerism, and Romanticism desire passion, fluidity, expression and spontaneity.

Once I understood this ongoing struggle, I was able to appreciate where LeWitt was coming from. Before LeWitt there was the Abstract Expressionists, whose art was based on a visual communication of sorts. They attempted to convey pure emotion directly onto the canvas without any regard for logic or traditional art forms. LeWitt called for a return to logic and reason; he uses the very building blocks of our society. He is using the very shapes and forms that have built our culture, from the wheel, to the pyramids to our present day architecture. He is actually making breakthroughs that can be used in the future.

In summation I would conclude that while Pollack may have been the master of abstraction through gesture, Picasso the master through form, LeWitt achieved similar status as an abstract artist using geometrical shapes and structures. He and his contemporaries have pioneered forms that very well may technologically advance our society. We see these forms all around us, in our web page and editorial design, architecture and the like. Through their efforts, we may find a new way to design a building, an exercise bike, and a better chair. If you think that these ideas aren’t powerful, just think of the dome of the Pantheon in Rome, which is no more than a series of circles, which revolutionized architecture for thousands of years. The possibilities are limitless.

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*As they were in direct opposition to this “bolshevist” style, they wanted to see a “German” style of architecture that would keep the values of an older, more rural type of society. By 1929 these arguments raged on in right-wing newspapers.*

## The Bauhaus

Jennie Re  
HIS 82  
Fall 2005  
Mentor: Professor Edelheit

Under the tottering political regime of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), Germany became for a short while the most thriving cultural center in all of Europe. Klee, Feininger, Kandinsky, the Russian constructivists, and many other artists came to live there. It was during this time that the “Bauhaus Style,” or the “New Architecture,” was created by a few German architects. This style was revolutionary in that it broke with past architectural tradition. It developed in France, Switzerland, and Holland at the same time, as radical architects all over Europe expressed through their art a total rebelliousness against the past. They viewed the devastation of World War I and technology’s role in the tremendous destruction as a signal to put an end to an outdated and outworn system. Therefore, this radically new architectural style, a direct by-product of the experience of war and revolution in Germany, came to reflect a new era in German society (Hochman 87; Lane 1-6).

The leader of this style, architect Walter Gropius, championed a new period of architectural history that had begun with the ending of the war. His “socially conscious” architecture would take its place in the political revolution that was enveloping Germany. He intended his style to be a significant representation of the new culture and the new society, which he believed would arise from the revolution. Gropius was firm in his conviction that an artist had a social responsibility to the community and that the community in turn had the responsibility to accept and support the artist. And to that end, he insisted that the Republic support his work (Lane 1-6).

The government’s patronage was the primary reason for the success of the new architecture in Germany. The first benefit to come about from this patronage was an art and architectural school, the Bauhaus, founded by Gropius in 1919 in Weimar, which was then the capital of Germany. A number of the most outstanding contemporary artists of that time such as Paul Klee, Vassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, and Oscar Schlemmer, as well as architects such as Mies van der Rohe, Hannes Meyer, and Le Corbusier were brought together to teach at the school. At first, the Bauhaus began as an arts and crafts institution, reflecting the trend in the rejection of technology by many in Germany. But in 1923, Gropius made an about face and shifted the school curriculum into one combining art, craft, technology, and functionalism in its teaching. Industrial and product design became important factors in the curriculum. The reason for the turnabout was to spur private industry to provide partial financing for the workshops, as

the state had reduced the school's allotment of operating funds. Apropos of this new direction, workshops now designed quality products that could be cheaply mass produced with a goal toward commercial production and sale: electric-light fixtures, furniture, textiles, radiators and tiles. This maneuver freed the Bauhaus from total dependence on state support. But the new philosophy at the Bauhaus served to create inner conflict for the faculty and students already at the school, as not all were in agreement with the new road that the school was taking (Hochman 89-90).

*Vorkurs*, the initial course taught at the school, was instruction in the basic principles of design but with a twist; students were encouraged to throw away all the traditions of European art in order to make a new beginning by experimenting with natural materials and abstract forms. *Vorkurs* is the modern day Basic Design course that has become one of the key foundational courses offered in architectural schools throughout the world today (Lane 56-7) (wikipedia.org). And it was such at the Bauhaus; after a student took the mandatory preliminary course of *Vorkurs*, he would be taught in workshops that had been incorporated into the program over the years: woodworking (1921-22), cabinetmaking (1921-32), ceramics (1922-33), weaving (1922-30), drawing (1922-30), photography (1922-33), painting (1922-33), metallurgy (1925-27), theater (1926-30) and architecture (1925-33). In this way, Gropius sought to create a "new guild of craftsmen without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist" (Hochman 89). Thereafter, the craftsmen, painters and sculptors of the future would do away with the social restrictions of the past, and combine all of their skills on cooperative projects, in a unity of art, technology and industry (Hochman 89-90; huntfor.com).

Between the years of 1923 and 1928 the school flourished. Just a few years after its opening, the radical architects received their largest commissions from the government to design the mass housing projects that were built in German cities as a new form of social housing for workers (flholocaustmuseum.org). Gropius spoke of the unencumbered, clean line of the new buildings, "The modern factory and the modern dwelling will be the expression of our time: precise, practical, free of ornament, effective only through the cubic composition of the masses" (Lane 67). And in this way, the Bauhaus style reconciled the aesthetics of design with the commercial demands of industrial mass production.

This new style came to be identified as a symbol of the liberal and left-wing municipal governments that built these housing developments. Due to the fact that the federal government had a part in the financing of the public housing, this new style came to be identified with them as well. Much publicity was given to the housing projects, and the new architecture was called part of a "new era" in German society. Gropius and other

architects, such as Erich Mendelsohn, received wide critical acclaim and it was under the guidance of the “revolutionary” government that these men were elevated to a leading position in German architecture. But the stringing together of this new architecture, tying it to a new society, and associating it with some kind of political sponsorship became more common during the twenties, not only by its supporters, but by its detractors as well. For the very success of the new style incited strong opposition which quickly became political dynamite. Therefore, almost as soon as the Bauhaus was founded, public controversy over the new architecture started up and raged on during the whole period of the Weimar Republic. During the years of 1919-1924, Gropius’ innovative training methods were debated by the citizens of Weimar and Thuringia; their concern was with the political and social implications of his ideas and how they affected his school’s curriculum. Right-wing newspapers decried charges of fostering “bolshevist architecture” and “art bolshevism” at the school. The uproar over the new architecture came to an end when after much local opposition; Gropius had no choice but to move his school in 1924 to Dessau, an industrial city characterized by progress and an interest in new ideas (Lane 1-6).

The controversy continued on the national level during the years of 1924 to 1930, as the end of inflation had again seen building occurring on a grand scale, and housing in the new style was constructed on a massive scale in many German cities, including Berlin, where more than 14,000 dwelling units were erected. And although the new style was employed in Germany in almost every type of building - in schools, factories, movie theaters, stores, and office buildings - the brouhaha focused mainly on the “character” of the housing developments that were designed by the radical architects (Lane 31). The mass housing projects were long, continuous surfaces with projecting balconies and stairwells, asymmetrical window arrangements and vivid patterns in bright, primary colors. During this time, the opponents of the “Bauhaus style,” mainly other architects and officials of the government, portrayed this kind of modern architecture as the “product of large-scale urbanization and a mass society dominated by machine technology” (Lane 31). As they were in direct opposition to this “bolshevist” style, they wanted to see a “German” style of architecture that would keep the values of an older, more rural type of society. By 1929 these arguments raged on in right-wing newspapers. At the time, the Nazi party was trying to increase their appeal to a national audience, and they “chose a side” when it came to the new architecture. “It was at that time that the Nazi party incorporated formal opposition to the new style in its political program” (Lane 40). After the Nazi regime came into power in 1933, they shut down the Bauhaus which was now located in Berlin. The Nazi Party had considered the Bauhaus a front for Communists, especially due to the fact that several Russian artists were involved in it. Nazi writers such as Alfred Rosenberg called the Bauhaus “un- German.” “That this

meant 'too many Jews' is evident from Gropius' response that there were 'only 17 students...of Jewish extraction, of whom none has a grant and most have been baptized'" (Hochman 86). It was in this way that German architecture had its involvement in politics, as it got caught up in the specific events of the postwar era, a foreboding of the horrific events to come (Lane 5).

German building design in the latter half of the nineteenth century was like the rest of Europe and America; it had been done in an overly decorated hodgepodge known in England and the United States as the Victorian Style. The town hall built in Munich from 1870 to 1890, its façade chock full of carved ornament was the typical style of the times, which also was evident in the "disorderly" outline of homes built with a myriad of turrets, gables and "gingerbread" moldings. Conversely, Bauhaus architects rejected "bourgeois" details such as cornices, eaves and decorative details on their buildings (Lane12). They embraced principles of Classical architecture in their purest form, incorporating no ornamentation at all in their designs. As such, the characteristics of Bauhaus building designs were: flat roofs, smooth facades, cubic shapes, glass curtain walls and unsupported corners. New engineering developments gave way to walls built around steel or iron frames. As such, walls were no longer the support of the structure, but only enveloped it from the outside. Colors were white, gray, beige or black. Floor plans were open, and furniture was functional. The Bauhaus made important contributions in the field of furniture design. The Cantilever chair by Dutch designer Mart Stam, using the tension capabilities of steel, and the Wassily chair designed by Marcel Breuer are two world famous examples ([architecture.about.com](http://architecture.about.com); [gemsinisrael.com](http://gemsinisrael.com)).

The fast rise of the new architecture in Germany in such a short period of time is best depicted by the Bauhaus buildings that Gropius built for his school of art and architecture at Dessau in 1926. "The Bauhaus complex represents the most highly developed example of architecture conceived as a sculptural arrangement of masses and planes in space" (Lane 29). The Bauhaus building had all the features of Bauhaus-style architecture, including the glass curtain walls, cubic blocks and unsupported corners. As such, above the ground floor Gropius encased the studio workshop in an extensive glass curtain wall; so that the workshop was made to look like it was a transparent box floating in space. Today in Dessau, a permanent exhibition of the history of the building and the Bauhaus movement is in the works. As the building suffered damage from bombing in World War II, a restoration is underway to coincide with its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. The steel and concrete skeleton of the building has already been repaired, and the workshops have been gutted. Tradesmen are in the process of reconstructing the interiors. The master architect, Monika Markgraf, is doing a mixture of conservation of what exists, and restoration of what is no longer there, in order to be true to the original building in all its Bauhaus style ([eins.com](http://eins.com)).

As many of the artists who fled or were exiled by the Nazi regime came to live here, the Bauhaus had a great impact upon art and architectural style in the United States. And while Bauhaus architecture had its European origin steeped in the social aspects of design, ironically, America's "International Style," as Bauhaus came to be known in America, was symbolic of capitalism. It became the favored architecture for office buildings and homes built for the rich. The Seagrams Building in New York is one example of the International Style. It was in the late 1930's that Mies van der Rohe, who had been appointed director of the Bauhaus in April of 1930, re-settled in Chicago and became one of the pre-eminent architects of the world. He made his mark on New York by designing, (along with Philip Johnson), the Seagrams Building on Park Avenue in 1957. In his design he used decorative bronze beams to draw attention to the height of the thirty-eight story skyscraper. He made the base of granite pillars, and above the pillars placed horizontal bands of bronze plating and bronze tinted glass, with a two story high lobby entirely enclosed in glass ([huntfor.com/arthistory](http://huntfor.com/arthistory)).

Americans wholeheartedly embraced the architects of the Bauhaus. Gropius, Breuer, Albers, Moholy-Nagy, and Bayer arrived in the United States at about the same time as Mies van der Rohe. Gropius was honored with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art before being hired on as the head of the school of architecture at Harvard (with Breuer following him there). And with Gropius' profound influence, the teaching of architecture at Harvard was transformed overnight as all architecture became non-bourgeois architecture. The old Beaux-Arts traditions became off-limits, and so did the legacy of Frank Lloyd Wright. Within three years, every so-called major American's contribution to contemporary architecture was reduced to a mere footnote - much to the chagrin of Wright, H.H. Richardson, and Louis Sullivan. While further perpetuating instruction in Bauhaus, Moholy-Nagy went on to open the New Bauhaus, which eventually became the Chicago Institute of Design, Albers opened a rural Bauhaus at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and Mies was hired on as dean of architecture at the Armour Institute in Chicago. And as the Armour Institute had merged with the Lewis Institute of Technology to form the Illinois Institute of Technology, Mies was named master builder and designed twenty-one large buildings in the middle of the Depression, at a time when building had become almost non-existent in the United States (Wolfe 45-7).

Another influential architect to design buildings in the United States in the typical International Style was leading French architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret aka Le Corbusier. It was Mies van der Rohe who originally brought Le Corbusier over from France to help on a worker-housing exhibition in Weissenhof in 1927. Subsequently, Le Corbusier was one of the architects hired to design the permanent buildings for the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. The UN building completed in 1952,

has become a distinguished part of the New York City skyline along the East River, as the Secretariat, a glass-sided slab that was primarily the design of Le Corbusier, can be admired today in all its “modern” architectural glory ([architecture.about.com](http://architecture.about.com)).

Ironically, Bauhaus, an architectural style that was a product of pre-Nazi Germany has had a major impact on architecture in Israel. Bauhaus was embraced in Tel Aviv in the 1930's at a time when socialist ideas were in the forefront, and the city was going through a period of great development. Most of the architects working in the new city at the time had come over from Europe, and had brought with them a style that was very much influenced by the works of Le Corbusier, Erich Mendelsohn, and the Bauhaus School of Art and Design. Therefore, many buildings were constructed in the Bauhaus/ International Style in the central area of Tel Aviv at the time, including cooperative workers' dwellings and hospitals, some under the design of architect Ariel Sharon (no relation to the current Israeli prime minister). While one may find evidence of this architectural style in Haifa and Jerusalem, as well as in many kibbutzim, it is much more commonplace in Tel Aviv. Currently Tel Aviv is in the process of a restoration project that will encompass more than 1500 International Style buildings. And amazingly enough, it is Tel Aviv that is home to the largest collection of buildings designed in the Bauhaus/ International Style to be found anywhere in the world ([huntfor.com](http://huntfor.com); [jewishvirtuallibrary.com](http://jewishvirtuallibrary.com); [gemsinisrael.com](http://gemsinisrael.com)).

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*The members of Aum Shinrikyo had certain beliefs and shared goals which were based on the apocalyptic view of Shoko Asahara. However, it should be noted that he changed his thought many times; this fits into the characteristics of new religious groups and cults as described by Lifton.*

## Sociological Analysis of Aum Shinrikyo

Katsuya Higuchi  
SOC 39  
Fall 2005  
Mentor: Professor Barbara Walters

**O**n March 20 1995 in Japan, the members of Aum Shinrikyo released a fatal nerve gas called sarin on five Tokyo subway trains heading toward Kasumigaseki, one of the most populated downtown areas in the center of the Japanese government. This resulted in the deaths of twelve people in the subway station or in the hospital shortly thereafter, and serious injuries to over 5,500 people. Almost all of the Japanese media were filled with this unbelievable news; Japan was covered with a sense of insecurity and unseen threat. “It was the end of the myth that Japan was a safe country” (Watanabe 1998: 80).

Among the recent emergence of new religious groups all over the world, the movement of Aum Shinrikyo was significant in terms of its external violence, which involved not only its members but also outsiders and the whole society. Because of this unusual group’s organization and activities, it is frequently categorized as a cult, or even a terrorist organization, or what sociologists think of as a new religion movement. However, there is a fine line between these types, and it is not easy to classify Aum Shinrikyo into one of the standard categories.

The purpose of this research paper is to conduct a sociological analysis of Aum Shinrikyo. I will provide general information on Shoko Asahara, the founder and the leader of Aum Shinrikyo. Then I will discuss the distinctive features of social phenomena such as religions or cults, which will be helpful for my analysis of Aum Shinrikyo. Then I will apply these sociological concepts to the group activities and actual figure of Aum Shinrikyo.

### **SHOKO ASAHARA AND AUM SHINRIKYO**

On March 2 1955, Shoko Asahara was born in a small village in Kyushu, the southern part of Japan, as a sixth child of a tatami maker, a traditional straw mat. He suffered from infantile glaucoma shortly after his birth, which left him completely blind in one eye, with limited sight in the other. He was sent with his brother, who was completely blind, to a state-run boarding school for the blind. Some articles mention the fact that he had a strong tendency to try to control other students around him, using the advantage of his limited eye sight, which the other students did not have. For example, they gave him money and status to use his abilities to describe the world around them or guide them through the local town (Juergensmeyer 2000: 103).

After graduating from the high school for the blind in 1975, he moved to Tokyo and changed his registered name, Chizuo Matsumoto, to Shoko Asahara. Around this period of time, he failed two college entrance examinations, one of which was for Tokyo University, which was one of the most prestigious colleges in Japan. He married Tomoko

Ishii in 1978. In 1981, he became a member of Agonshu, an esoteric Buddhist new religious group, but he became disenchanted with and left it in 1984, because it paid less attention to ascetic practices than he wanted. Then, he took a path to establish his own group, Aum Shinrikyo.

Shoko Asahara founded Aum shinsen no kai (Aum circle Devine Hermits), a yoga and meditation group with a small membership, in 1984. In 1987, he transformed it to Aum Shinrikyo, whose doctrine was a mixture of Himayana Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and yoga philosophy. Shortly after that, Aum Shinrikyo intensified its social activities and opened branch offices in Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka as well as some foreign countries. They opened at least five bases in Russia (Police White Paper 1996: 6). In Australia, they established a company called “Mahaposya Australia”, which was suspected of purchasing large amounts of chemicals and producing chemical substances (Police White Paper 1996: 7). Aum Shinrikyo also had some businesses: a tea plantation in Sri Lanka and the establishment of a trading company in Taiwan (Police White Paper 1996: 7). By the time of Tokyo subway attack in 1995, Aum Shinrikyo had expanded to 10,000 believers in Japan and 20,000 in Russia (Watanabe 1998: 81).

1989 was a significant year for Aum Shinrikyo. First of all, Aum Shinrikyo attempted to register with the government under the Religious Corporation Law, which allowed it to have special tax privileges and the right to own property. The group was having trouble with families who were complaining about the movement until it finally gained legal status in August. At the same time the *Sunday Mainichi*, a Japanese Newspaper, ran a seven-part series about the group and its deviant activities, such as the separation of its members from their families. As a response to it, Aum Shinrikyo higaisha no kai (Aum Shinrikyo Victim’s Society) was established, supported by Sakamoto Tsutsumi, a Yokohama lawyer, who was eventually killed with his family by the members of Aum Shinrikyo. In addition, Shoko Asahara and his followers formed a political party and ran for the election. However, the failure in the election raised a lot of criticism from the media, and resulted in Aum’s armament activities shortly thereafter. Then, Aum Shinrikyo embarked on the path for the Tokyo subway gas attack after repeating some violence toward the outside such as sarin gas incident in Matsumoto (central Japan).

## INTRODUCTION OF VARIOUS CHARACTERISTICS

It is essential and worthwhile to discuss the several sociological perspectives regarding to the characteristics of religions and cults because these are necessary in establishing criteria for the investigation. First, are the five characteristics of religion established by Ronald Johnstone (2004). He describes the characteristics of religion as below.

- 1) religion is a group phenomena – religion involves common goals shared by two or more people who have certain patterns of interaction
- 2) religion is concerned with the sacred or supernatural – religion often involves extraordinary phenomena that are outside normal and regular everyday occurrences
- 3) religion involves a body of beliefs – religion has a developed explanation and beliefs that illustrate what to do for what
- 4) set of practices – religion has particular practices carried out by the believers to obtain the valued goal
- 5) moral prescriptions – religion has the explanation to judge what is “good” “worthwhile” “bad” or “harmful”

Sociologists often avoid using the term cult because it lacks scientific precision and because the term has a negative image often associated with violence or suicide (Johnstone 2004: 109). Nonetheless, since Aum Shinrikyo is often considered as cult, it is useful to provide the characteristics of cults. The followings are six characteristics of cults as described by Ronald L. Johnstone (2004):

- 1) tendency to reject the norms of society or normal religious patterns
- 2) emphasis of the new revelation or insight
- 3) most likely led by charismatic leader
- 4) strong individualistic emphasis
- 5) tendency to be small and informal
- 6) relatively short-lived because of the dependence on the charismatic leader

These characteristics describing cult groups are somewhat ambiguous in terms of scientific measurement partly because of the difficulty in drawing a sharp line between new religious movements, sects and cults. Moreover, the so-called cult groups do not necessarily involve every aspect that Johnstone identifies. Therefore, it will be helpful to add other criteria in order to extend parameters for classification. What follows are the characteristics of new religious groups and cults by Lifton (1993).

- 1) the shift of the worship from spiritual ideals to the charismatic leader
- 2) the combination of spiritual search by followers and economic and sexual exploitation by the controlling group

- 3) reforming the thought or doctrine and using of brainwashing-like methods

In their essay, “Reflection on Aum Shinrikyo,” Lifton also discuss ideological totalism, which is also relates to Aum Shinrikyo to some degree. Their concepts seem to define rather accurately the characteristics of Aum Shinrikyo. Thus, I will introduce another two characteristics from their discussion:

- 1) total milieu control – tries to have a perfect control within itself, e.g., control over all information exchange
- 2) determining rights to existence – the absolute right to determine who is to exist and who is not.

#### ANALYSIS OF AUM SHIRIKYO

There are many ways of describing Aum Shinrikyo: fanatic group, religion, cult, new religious group, religious-inspired group, separatist group. It is obvious that Aum Shinrikyo was a group phenomenon throughout the period between its establishment as a yoga group and the Tokyo subway attack. It was involved with literally hundreds of thousands of members, not only in Japan but also in foreign countries such as Russia, although the initial members of Aum Shinsen no kai was about only fifteen, according to Ian Reader.

The members of the group apparently carried out certain practices to obtain shared goals. Manabu Watanabe, in his analytical essay, “Religion and Violence in Japan Today,” mentions two points that Shoko Asahara stressed when he founded Aum Shinsen no kai. Shoko Asahara told his followers to achieve self-enlightenment (*gedatsu*) and self-realization (*satori*) through the yoga practice. The article also points out that Shoko Asahara, in a monthly journal, *Mahayana*, in 1987, claimed the need for three kinds of salvation: liberating people from the suffering of disease, making life in this world happy, and leading people to enlightenment and self-realization. At this point, it is fair to say that Aum Shinirkyo, or the former group, Aum Shinsen no kai, had some aspects of religion.

Aum Shinrikyo had their own moral prescriptions based on their beliefs, a characteristic of religion. However, the journal article also claimed the absolute right of the guru, one of the characteristics of ideological totalism. Ian Reader, a Scottish scholar of Japanese new religion, looked into a 360-page photocopied manuscript of Aum Shinrikyo and concluded that it had a lot of references to the moral acceptance of mercy killing, which supported the “right of the guru and of spiritually advanced practitioners to kill those who otherwise would fall into the hells” (quoted in Juergensmeyer 2000: 114). This aspect of Aum Shinrikyo should be regarded as one of the characteristics of

ideological totalism rather than of religion because the fact that is claimed the authority to dispense with existence to be more the right of the guru than something following set moral prescriptions.

Even though Aum Shinrikyo was functioning as a group that had beliefs and common goal, these involved a complete rejection of the normal society. For instance, Asahara claimed that those who are engaged in the materialism of ordinary society absorb negative karma. According to this view, members can only purify themselves through rejection of the world and performing ascetic practices; otherwise they will fall into the hells after death and experience a disadvantaged rebirth.

The members of Aum Shinrikyo had certain beliefs and shared goals which were based on the apocalyptic view of Shoko Asahara. However, it should be noted that he changed his thought many times; this fits into the characteristics of new religious groups and cults as described by Lifton (1993). Ian Reader, in his essay, "Dramatic Confrontation: Aum Shinrikyo Against the World," explains the shift of Asahara's perspective regarding apocalypse and the salvation. According to him, Shoko Asahara prophesied in 1986 that nuclear war would occur before 1999. Then, at the same time, he stated that it could be avoided by the spiritually advanced members of Aum Shinrikyo, who would be able to purify the negative karma in the world. However, he first claimed that Aum might not be able to achieve universal salvation in early 1988 and shifted to partial salvation for only those who followed Aum Shinrikyo. It is clear from these examples that Aum Shinrikyo had developed characteristics of cults, new religious movements, or ideological totalism, and was considered just as harmful and noxious to mainstream society. It also had other cult-like characteristics such as charismatic leadership, economic exploitation, sexual exploitation, and the use of brainwashing-like methods.

Asahara experienced a type of mysticism, which is often considered as an aspect of charismatic leader. Asahara Shoko claimed to have experienced the awakening of kundalini as early as 1981 (Watanabe, p83). And also, he repeated that he was called upon by Shiva, the Hindu god, to become "the God of light who leads the armies of the gods" (Lifton 1993: 16).

It makes sense to look into what his follower had to say in order to observe whether or not Shoko Asahara was a charismatic leader. Mark Juergensmeyer interviewed Yasuo Hiramatsu, who is a former member of Aum Shinrikyo. This interview shows the strong bond between Shoko Asahara and his followers; he was seen as a charismatic leader. Even though the interview took place after the Tokyo subway attack, Yasuo Hiramatsu said, "All our members still trust our Master." More surprisingly, he stated, "He (Shoko Asahara) must have had a religious reason," even if he was involved with the

Tokyo subway attack and found to be guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. This view was shared by other group members.

The economic exploitation by Aum Shinrikyo can be seen primarily in their dual system of membership. The group was divided into two types of members, ordained and lay. If one became an ordained member, he/she not only had to donate all his\her belongings to Aum Shinrikyo but also had to ask his/her parents for the share of any inheritance. The tendency toward economic and sexual exploitation often resulted in violence toward the member of the group or trouble with the family of the member. It is reported that Aum Shinrikyo abducted a 63-year-old innkeeper, one of their followers, for the large sum of money acquired from the sale of part of his land (Police White Paper 1996: 8). Furthermore, it is reported that Shoko Asahara was sexually involved with Ishii Hisako, a young female member of the group, and her parents' anger was increased toward Aum Shinrikyo.

Aum Shinrikyo employed methods which can be considered to be brainwashing. Lifton interviewed a member of Aum Shinrikyo, who was university-educated and in his early thirties. The interviewee described and explained an exercise to overcome the "polluted data" of the outside world, one which Aum Shinrikyo proposed. According to his explanation, the exercise consisted of repeating the words written or spoken by Shoko Asahara, sometimes with flashing visuals and earphones. He also reported that he had mystical experiences, such as seeing magnificent images or bright lights. At this point, it is quite clear that Aum Shinrikyo had more of the characteristics of a cult, new religious movement, or ideological totalism than of religion.

Aum Shinrikyo is sometimes seen as a terrorist group because of the external violence committed by its members. It would be fair to label the Tokyo subway attack by Aum Shinrikyo as an act of terrorism, and to discuss the similar aspects between Aum Shinrikyo and other groups that are considered as terrorist groups. However, comparing Aum Shinrikyo with terrorist groups and measuring the degree of terrorism extends beyond the scope of this research paper. This would require other frameworks specific to terrorism. In addition to that, the use of the term terrorism in the modern society in which we live is ambiguous. Therefore, I mention on in passing, as a suggestion for future research, the similarity between Aum Shinrikyo and al Qaeda, which has been recognized as a terrorist group in the United States. Both of these groups share a characteristic, which to develop their own interpretation of a specific term and use it to justify their external violence toward the world around them. Al Qaeda uses the term "jihad", the Muslim concept of struggle, to motivate it followers to fight and to justify its violence, although "the concept of jihad is not a carte blanche for violence" in words of Mark Juergensmeyer. According to him, the use of the jihad concept to justify their violence "has been highly controversial within Muslim theological circles."

Similarly, Aum Shinrikyo employed the Tibetan Buddhist term “poa” to justify their violence, sometimes even their murders. According to Manabu Watanabe, “poa” means the transference of consciousness; it has been claimed that a skillful lama can transfer the soul of an animal to a higher realm, or the Pure Land. Shoko Asahara turned this term into a concept referring to his absolute right to decide who should die and when. His interpretation of “poa” can be seen his words at the trial in Tokyo District Court on 24 April 1996. “In my previous existence, I myself have killed someone at my guru’s order. When your guru orders you to take someone’s life, it’s an indication that that person’s time is already up. In other words, you are killing that person exactly at the right time and thereby letting that person have his poa” (Religion and Violence in Japan Today). Thus, Both Aum Shinrikyo and al Qaeda use particular terms to control the followers and justify their violence.

## CONCLUSION

It is true that Aum Shinrikyo had some aspects which can be considered as characteristics of religion. Nevertheless, as discussed thus far, it is much more accurate to say that it is in the different category, such as a new religious movement or “cult”, which is frequently viewed as threatening and harmful to the majority of the society in which it exists. It is obvious that it has several characteristics of these types, such as the dispensing of existence, the rejection of the normal society, thought-reform, charismatic leaders, economic and sexual exploitation, and the use of brainwashing-like method. In my opinion, Aum Shinrikyo should be categorized as a new religious movement, because of the characteristics mentioned and the fact that the term, cult, is no longer viewed as useful among sociologists. .

Starting as a small group of yoga practitioners, Aum Shinrikyo ended up as a new religious movement, committing a series of violent acts toward the surrounding world. Ian Reader discusses the transformation of the Aum’s internal violence to external violence in his essay; he explains that these were initially defensive actions to fight for the truth in the eyes of the group members which were often seen as acts of aggression. The table in the following page illustrates the interaction between Aum Shinrikyo and the society with relate to the origin of Aum’s external violence.

Starting as a “world-rejecting movement,” Aum Shinrikyo developed several internal problems including beatings of disciples, the cover-up of an accidental death of one of the members, and the murder of the member who tried to expose it. As a result of these barbarous activities, Aum Shinrikyo developed numerous enemies, such as a hostile media, opposition campaigns by the families and their lawyers, and conflicts with both their neighbors and local authorities in the area where it established the communes.

Eventually, Aum Shinrikyo armed itself and headed down the path of external violence to protect itself.

New religious groups have been emerging everywhere; it would probably be impossible to find a place where there are no new religious movements. In the United States, thirty-nine members of Heaven's Gate, an apocalyptic UFO group in California, committed a mass suicide on March 1997. In the early fall 1994, fifty-three members of the Order of the Solar Temple either committed suicide or were killed by other members in Switzerland and Quebec. In the early spring 2000, nine-hundred-seventy-nine members of Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments ended their lives by either murder or suicide in Uganda. In China, the groups called Falun Gong, whose origin is in Buddhism and Taoism, has been in trouble with its government. Aum Shinrikyo is one of them and presumably shares characteristics with these groups.

I believe there is a question to be asked: what makes new religious groups violent? This discussion will be significant for further investigation of those groups and for prevention of both the internal and external violence they might foster. Many of the articles and essays reported in this research paper discuss this issue, and the importance of the sociological task ahead in conducting empirical research on new religious groups in order to provide better insight and knowledge to the society.

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## **G**andhi: Saint or Sinner?

Sonia Valentin  
History 82  
Fall 2005  
Mentor: Professor Abraham Edelheit

Many dictionaries define a saint as an individual considered holy, worthy of public veneration and a virtuous person. A sinner, however, offers a contrasting array of definitions, characterizing one who sins without repent or an evildoer. A sin is a transgression of a religious or moral law, is an action shamefully or wrongly done and a sinner is an evildoer performs morally unjust acts (The American Heritage Dictionary, 298 & 773). Gandhi serves as an outstanding example of an international figure simultaneously viewed as a saint and sinner. While his admirers regarded Gandhi as Mahatma, a great soul, who appeared to have Christ-like qualities, his detractors considered him a sinner. Historians have long documented Gandhi's public beliefs before and after his death. While thrusting important issues into the public domain, such as racial discrimination and debating religious intolerance, global imperialism and colonialism, his stance on these controversial topics have led people to regard him worldwide both as a savior or tyrant, or perhaps a saint or a sinner.

Gandhi's admirers recite his early days in India pursuing a conventional non-white English colonial life while complying with British laws and paying their taxes. After graduating from a London law school, he was called to the bar and pledged his allegiance to the British Crown. At this point in his life, his identity as an Indian man was transitory: he sang the British anthem, dressed fashionably in European clothing, with starched shirts, suits and ties. Conversely, his adversaries criticized the sinner Gandhi for negating and disowning his Indian roots, based on his atypical English dress, which dishonored the traditional Dhoti, a ritualistically draped cotton cloth. Gandhi also unforgivably ate meat, and as a practicing Hindu vegetarian "never read the important religious Indian book, *Bhagavad Gita* in Sanskrit, or even in Gujarati, his mother tongue" (Nanda, 4).

As a morally righteous British subject, Gandhi believed all men were God's children but he quickly shed his naivete as he witnessed the daily atrocities and inequalities that Indians endured in England and South Africa solely for being non-white. He fought against racial discrimination and the stifling indignities imposed by Britain and suffered by other non-whites who were Asian and African. The indignities included not being to allowed to walk on sidewalks with whites; being obligated to register and carry an ID card at all times so officials knew who they were; receiving meager wages, and being called coolies, kaffir or colored by the whites. The privileged whites did not have to bear these humiliating experiences.

The British viewed Gandhi as evil for inciting non-whites, especially Indians, to demonstrate against Britain's unjust and racist laws. Britain considered all non-whites as inferior underlings and forbade them from enjoying privileges that whites had. In the railroads non-whites were relegated to third class cars on trains, regardless of their social status or financial capability. Non-whites were forbidden from walking on the sidewalks and had to carry identification cards. This caused Gandhi's social consciousness and awareness of Britain's unfairness and cruelty to be intensified. His gut instinct of not retaliating physically at his oppressors demonstrated his inherent pacifist tendencies of opposing violence as a means to resolve disputes. Gandhi also used the British legal system to evoke change of the unjust laws and acts inflicted on non-whites. Gandhi rebelled and, according to historian Sanderson Beck Gandhi, "refused to remove his turban in court; he was thrown out of a first-class railway compartment; he was beaten for refusing to move to the footboard of a stage-coach for the sake of a European passenger; and he was pushed and kicked off a footpath by a policeman" (Keay, 98).

The British considered Gandhi an evildoer and manipulator. Gandhi had developed a form of protest which he called 'Satyagraha' translated as 'soul force' or 'insistence on truth' (Kytle 91). To most observers it was 'passive resistance' but to Gandhi it was something much more constructive and much more demanding. Drawing on the non-violent Jain and Vaishnava traditions of his native Gujarat, it elevated suffering and denial into a quasi-religious discipline, like yoga or meditation (Keay, 471). Gandhi and his supporters also practiced ahimsa, which meant 'non-hurting,' usually translated as 'nonviolence'. Ahimsa became his preferred method in the search for truth. His belief of hating the sin and not the sinner led Indians to practice the act of non-violent passive resistance. This ingenious tactic of Gandhi's proved to be a godsend since it showed the British and the world that Indians were willing to effect change from their oppressors without violence or bloodshed and always meet hate with love in a peaceful and dignified manner.

Gandhi rationalized that perhaps he could convert some of the white non-believers who agreed with the government's policy of discrimination. One objective was to have white oppressors see Indians as human beings worthy of respect and admiration. That is why he would not allow violence at any cost, and forbid any sort of self-defense from any of his followers. Sympathy was needed globally for those who suffered atrocities at the hands of the imperialists who suppressed the native Indians.

British indifference included negligence towards Indian culture and the spiritual and religious meaning behind their traditions, therefore creating a clash of cultures between the two countries' ethos and people. The English refused to acknowledge Gandhi's wearing of a turban as required by his Indian religion and culture, and Gandhi would not deny either to appease the British authorities. Britain wanted men of all other faiths and cultures to quickly assimilate and embrace their 'English' way of life, not the heathen life the British authorities believed non-whites led.

Gandhi was venerated as he slowly embraced his Indian culture in 1912 by giving “up [his] European dress and cow’s milk, restrict[ing] himself to a diet of fresh and dried fruit, nuts and goat’s milk” (Internet Dec. 19, 2005). At the crux of his popularity Gandhi forsook every personal material possession, lived in an ashram - a residence of a community and its guru (American Heritage Dictionary, 50) - wore sandals, dressed in loincloths, and commenced reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. By studying different religions and reading their sacred texts in the Koran and the bible, Gandhi retained certain learned tenets that enhanced his spiritual beliefs. He now was on his way to becoming the savior of India.

Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of Britain and a critic of Gandhi, considered him a charlatan, who was unprofessional and disrespectful because of his garb, “a half-dressed fakir,” while meeting with the King-Emperor’s representative (Keay, 488). Gandhi should have been respectful and dressed in English attire while meeting with men of the British Empire. Gandhi’s admirers noted that:

“under colonial rule, India was required to export all its cotton at a nominal rate to England, where it was manufactured into cloth in the factories of Lancashire and sold back to the poor in India at many times the price they had been paid for growing it. Gandhi wanted all Indians, rich as well as poor; to learn the age-old craft of handspinning so that the people of the seven hundred thousand impoverished villages of India could regain self-employment, self-reliance and self-respect. He asked all Indians to wear the rough white homespun cloth called khadi, and boycott foreign cloth. Khadi became the symbol of independence, linking the upper and middle classes of Indian society to the vast masses of the poor “(Easwaran p. 76).

Gandhi's critics point out his nonrational use of spinning wheels as opposed to looms to manufacture cloth. They charged he did not understand that modernization of India's mass production of clothing was central to financial autonomy , the employment of the masses, and worldwide distribution of clothing. They complained his vision was small.

Mill workers loathed Gandhi for their plight of massive unemployment caused by the shutting down of many British mills and factories since he encouraged Indians not to buy British imported cloth. This caused an economic hardship and loss to the British manufacturing companies in India. However, when Gandhi presented his point of view to the mill workers and explained the effects that imported British clothing profits had on the oppression of Indians, the English mill workers embraced Gandhi and supported the Indian cause overwhelmingly even though they had lost their jobs.

Winston Churchill also considered Gandhi a sinner because this little brown man would not adhere to British law. Gandhi also did not want India to become

involved in a war with Japan, so he was imprisoned from 1942 to 1944 and went on a hunger strike. When Gandhi was near death Churchill said, "I would keep him there [in prison] and let him do as he likes" (Daily News, 8). Churchill did not care if Gandhi died. Gandhi was an enemy of the British Empire.

Gandhi's global use of the press incensed the British as it highlighted English brutality and Indian oppression. The newspapers' photographs showed beaten and bloodied Indians peacefully refusing to fight the British. This also highlighted the Indian practice of peaceful resistance. The British hated that Gandhi manipulated every event. He gathered friends, men and women to join him at his well-attended and silently effective protests. He was passionate in his advocacy that Indians be treated as equals and with dignity like the whites. Gandhi used the media effectively and his admirers realized the benefits of gaining worldwide support by any means possible. Gandhi contacted anyone who was willing to listen and write about the exploitation of Indians.

The British considered Gandhi a manipulator since he was verbal and had no qualms about his willingness to die for his beliefs as he fasted, for days on end and did so many, many times. Britain did not want to make Gandhi, or his supporters, martyrs or saints. That so few Britons kept millions of Indians under their thumb was mind-boggling to the world. His supporters always came to his defense and refused to allow Gandhi to die whenever he fasted. These saintly fasts only endeared him more to his supporters and actually converted many non-believers to Gandhi's side and found his struggle to be just.

Gandhi's deeds even infuriated his supporters who considered his acts dastardly. Gandhi believed that all Indians were brothers. He called the untouchables, the lowest caste in Indian society, the Harijans - children of God. Indians of different sects such as the Muslims, Sikhs, and Buddhists questioned his veracity of dining, socializing and at times living with the untouchables since this lowly caste was stigmatized as the lowest echelon in Indian society. Embracing the untouchables was an obtuse concept for Indians to fathom, since no one had ever expressed such unimaginable and positive love towards these men, women and children. It was abominable that Gandhi wanted to change centuries of Indian beliefs and traditions. He was vilified for this.

But Gandhi's supporters loved him for making many realize that they were all children of God, wanting independence from Britain and wanting one united India. Gandhi believed that no man or woman should be treated as an outcast, despite their status in society, and everyone should love and respect one another, especially if they lived and worked together in mother India. However, Gandhi's religious detractors among both Muslims and Hindus who had coexisted in peace for years became concerned about which group would rule, the Hindus or the Muslims, if and when India were freed from British rule. Many in both groups loathed his preaching of mutual love and respect between these two religious groups and viewed him as evil incarnate.

Muslims hated Gandhi for embracing Hindus, and the Hindus rejected Gandhi for accepting Muslims and reading the Koran. Worldwide criticism was always prevalent because Gandhi alienated many people with his unrelenting stubbornness and provincial ideas and his insistence on having things his way regardless of the concerns of others. While Gandhi was persuaded that India should be self-governing and liberated from British rule, he also envisioned the day when all Indians, Muslims, Hindus and the untouchables would unite and live cohesively, in a unified India. However, Gandhi did not fully comprehend that a myriad of individuals also had plans for India and hated his concept of a unified India. Mohamed Ali Jinnah and The Muslim League, repeatedly informed Gandhi and the British Empire that they coveted their own land in India, separate from the Hindus.

“The most distinguished victim of the hatred aroused by the division of India was Gandhi, the founder of the modern Indian nationalist movement. The only feasible solution appeared to be the establishment of two states, one Hindu and one Muslim. The creation of India and Pakistan involved an exchange of population, the moving of millions of refugees, accompanied by terrible hardships. Moreover, the delineation of the frontiers did not clearly separate Hindus from Muslims, and some controversies, such as the dispute over the control of Kashmir, led to bitter and long-lasting tension between the two states” (Gilbert & Large, 401-2).

The Muslims and Hindus preferred worshiping in their own mosques with their loved ones. But Gandhi, blind-sighted by his devotion to India, continued to lobby his detractors and tried to cajole, give them more rights and used any tactic necessary to try and keep India intact.

In conclusion Gandhi's place in history may be considered sacred and it would be difficult to duplicate his accomplishments. Multitudes of devotees unwaveringly voice their love for him as a saint and spiritual leader. Indians loved him for getting India its independence from the British Empire through his philosophy of non-violent passive resistance or Satyagraha. Gandhi appeared to have Christ-like qualities representing an ideal type of humanism, since he loved mankind, was extremely spiritual, and seemed to possess a holy soul. According to his adoring followers, Gandhi could do no wrong. He was constantly evolving as a human being.

His innovative and humane concept of nonviolence and civil disobedience as a means for Indians to gain their freedom and be treated fairly was defiant and effective. Piety, kindness, a loving heart, wanting to help others, and passion in his beliefs are all characteristics of the behavior of a saint. When an extremist Hindu assassinated Gandhi in January 1946, the renowned physicist Albert Einstein commented "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth" (Gandhi film 1982).

Gandhi went into battle firmly believing that God was on his side for preserving Indian souls. Though his incarcerations in jail were troubling and his fasts dangerously long, these acts clearly resulted in Indians venerating him as a saint and savior who they believed could free them from their misery. Gandhi inherently believed that man was good and by staging large radical protests where the oppressed peacefully burned their identification cards, and made demands on behalf of the indigo laborers for better pay and lower taxes from their employers, Gandhi felt he could affect change. He was innovative for being cognizant of the press's role in helping to advertise the sinful and atrocious maltreatment of non-whites. Therefore he was always looking for different causes to challenge as well as to irritate Indian abusers and oppressors.

Whether he was a saint or sinner, Gandhi was able to effect change. He managed to obtain India's independence from Great Britain, with the help of many others sympathetic to this cause. Gandhi used this protest method with indigo cultivators, farmers, mill workers and the underprivileged. Gandhi's evolving radicalism spearheaded him to try and rectify these injustices and through many years of struggle Indians eventually obtained respectability, decent wages, no unfair taxes and better living conditions.

Finally, not all people saw him as saintly and some considered him a sinner. The whites in South Africa and India hated Gandhi because he humiliated them in the world's eyes by highlighting the glaring abuse Indians suffered at the hands of public officials and the police. British laws favoring whites and discriminating against non-whites showed the world English inhumanity. Gandhi looked saintly because he finally brought British injustice to a halt and helped to gain Indian Independence. But only time and history will decide if Gandhi was a sinner or saint.

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*Duccio created works of art that dealt almost exclusively with religious subject matter. Primarily his paintings were made for altarpieces. These were panels that were painted or sculpted that were often situated at the altar of a Catholic church or in someone's home on a private altar.*

## **D**uccio's *Madonna and Child*

Lionel Carre

Art 034

Fall 2005

Mentor: Professor Caterina Pierre

The recent acquisition of Duccio Di Buoninsegna's Madonna and Child by the Metropolitan Museum of Art has stirred up much excitement. Interest from the art media and the general public has made this work a recent highlight in the European Renaissance wing. My knowledge of this work of art was vague, but I was intrigued by the fact that it cost the museum a substantial amount of money (rumored at 45 million dollars) to purchase this significant piece.

As I entered the Renaissance wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, bold red letters are used to proudly introduce their latest acquisition to the public. Within a small protective glass casing, the Madonna and Child is displayed. The size of the wooden panel is surprisingly small; it is no bigger than a piece of eight by eleven-inch printer paper. The painting is further dwarfed by the other paintings and altarpieces on display in the same room. Yet a visitor would suspect the importance of the Madonna and Child by the manner in which it is presented. Tempera and gold were used to create this piece on a wooded panel. Tempera is type of paint that is made by combing egg yolk and pigment. This combination of egg and pigment creates a durable paint that also produces very rich colors.

Duccio painted this panel in the first decade of the fourteenth century. This period in European history is known as the early Renaissance. The term means that there was a rebirth or a revival of interest in the age of antiquity. This interest spread across various media including architecture, sculpture and painting. European artists became highly influenced by the past and felt that as a society they were as capable of producing such great art.

As I began to scrutinize the Madonna and Child I was able to have a better appreciation for this work of art. Not until the viewer takes time to absorb the miniscule details in this painting can one see its value. The main subject of the Madonna and Child is the depiction of Christ's mother, Mary, holding on to him as a baby. This would not have been the first time this mother and child relationship would be created in a work of art. Yet, the manner in which Duccio conveys the bond between them seems very

different. The viewers cannot help to feel that as the baby reaches out to his mother that she is aware of his destiny. The Madonna has very poignant facial features. She is not reacting like a mother would as she holds the child that reaches out to her. Mary does not even make eye contact with the child. She is looking slightly outward toward the viewers. I believe Duccio has painted her to look as if she accepts that her child will die for the sins of man, and wishes the viewer to accept this as well.

Unlike many works of art from the same time period, Duccio Di Buoninsegna's Madonna and Child at first glance seems very simple. The use of decorative properties is kept to a minimum in the background and around the piece. Rather than have ornate designs distract the viewers, Duccio has opted to use the gold paint or gold leaf for the decorations in the background panel. Behind the heads of the Madonna and Jesus are halos. Duccio also adds very minimal gold designs over the figure of the Madonna. They seem to resemble an idealized snowflake or a star pressed into the gold leaf. The reasons for these particular designs are unknown. The manner in which the design is applied resembles more an engraving than a painted brushstroke. The intricate details of both of the halos are so fine and minute that they resemble the craftsmanship of a modern day goldsmith. Additionally, Duccio paints a subtle boarder around the subjects. The gold designs are pronounced as lighting reflects the fine lines. There is something to be said about the understated design sense of Duccio. The Madonna and Child captures the interest of all those that take time to appreciate its fine beauty.

The history of the Metropolitan Museum's latest prized acquisition is a very obscure one. Not until recently was the public aware of its existence. As matter of fact, this is one of the rare instances in history in which a work by Duccio Di Buoninsegna's Madonna and Child has been on permanent public exhibition in the United States. The Frick Collection in New York also has a work by Duccio, a small panel from his famed *Maesta Altarpiece*.

There are numerous questions that have left me to wonder how the Madonna and Child existed all these years without being known to exist. More than 700 years old, this panel must have changed hands numerous times. More importantly I wondered who the original patron of this work was. Why would have Duccio created such a small panel piece? Is it possible like many altarpieces that this could be part of a larger panel, only to be separated over the years (as was Duccio's *Maesta Altarpiece*)? With such an outstanding acquisition price tag, I cannot help to wonder if this is truly a one of a kind panel. How is it that the Madonna and Child was not known to exist until recently? Could there be any more paintings from Duccio out there waiting to be rediscovered?

As I began to pursue information regarding Duccio Di Buoninsegna and his Madonna and Child I looked toward the Metropolitan Museum of Art as my major

source. Since they are the first major institution to exhibit this specific work by Duccio, I knew their recorded research on the topic would be vast and informative.

## Research

With so much attention surrounding the acquisition of the Madonna and Child finding out the price tag on this panel was very easy. Before the unveiling the Metropolitan Museum of Art tried best not to make it an issue of how much Duccio's very rare single panel would cost. It was not long that reports arose of its cost exceeding a staggering \$45 million. The deal was negotiated through Christie's auction house in London, making it the most expensive painting purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the museum's history.

Those unfamiliar with the rarity of this panel have questioned why a painting the size of a sheet of typing paper would cost so much. There are only a dozen paintings by Duccio that have survived the test of time. Even fewer of those are complete works such as the Madonna and Child. The majority of the works available are part of larger panels such as the Maesta Altarpiece (1308 - 1311), which has almost sixty different narrative scenes. Until the arrival of the Madonna and Child, Duccio's The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain, a fragment of the Maesta Altarpiece at the Frick collection, was the only Duccio in a New York museum.

Duccio created works of art that dealt almost exclusively with religious subject matter. Primarily his paintings were made for altarpieces. These were panels that were painted or sculpted that were often situated at the altar of a Catholic church or in someone's home on a private altar. An altarpiece can consist of multiple panels such as a diptych (two panels) or a triptych (three panels). In the case of the Maesta Altarpiece it would be called a polyptych because it is made of more than three panels. Often these grand altarpieces depicted the life of Christ or the Madonna as well as other followers of Jesus.

Keith Christiansen, curator of European painting at the Met, states that "if you think of the great Renaissance paintings in the Met, they're all small. Our Botticelli, The Last Communion of St. Jerome, Our Mantegna, Adoration of the Shepards, or our diptych by Van Eyck - all our greatest pictures are small pictures" (Vogel, 2004).

The first recorded owner of the Madonna and Child was Count Grigorii Stroganoff, a patron of early Italian paintings during the nineteenth century. A patron is someone who supports the cause of an artist by purchasing their work or sponsoring them. The Stroganoff Madonna is currently the official name of the panel.

Although the first owner of the Madonna and Child remains a mystery, it is fair

to say that the owners would either have been privileged and came from of a middle class background or that the piece was made for a church. There is evidence that the bottom of the panel was burned by candle fire because it was placed near an altar. Citizens of the lower class usually were not patrons of art. Often the privileged families commissioned works of art to be placed in churches and chapels in honor of a saint or the Virgin Mary. In return, the family was pardoned for their sins thus reducing the amount of time spent in purgatory. The sale of these pardons, also known as indulgences, eventually ended when German Catholics spawned the Protestant Reformation movement. This movement for a demand in the changes in the church's policies was spearheaded by Martin Luther (1483 - 1546).

Being one of the masters of Italian painting, Duccio is also an important representative of the Sienese School. During the 1300s Siena was considered to be one of the major cities in Italy. Their thriving economy made Siena the idea city for bankers and other businessmen at the time. This thriving economy allowed patrons to commission works of art. The increase in the demand for art also eventually helped to further advance the styles and creative process.

The Sienese (as well as all Italians in general) are famous for their devotion to the Virgin Mary. During the battle of Monteperti (1260), the Sienese believed that their devotion allowed them to be victorious. It is not surprising that images of the Virgin Mary are the main subject matter for many artists of the Sienese school.

Duccio's influences can also be found in Byzantine style of art. Now modern day Istanbul, Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire lasted from approximately 300 CE to the fifteenth century. Features characteristic of the style can be found in the elongated figures. The limbs of the figures were painted longer and usually in a very flat frontal position. The elongated figures are usually painted with rich colors, which set them apart from the classic golden backgrounds. Often Byzantine artists also depicted leaders of the government. These leaders felt that they were put in power by a higher power and were leaders of the church as well.

Byzantine artists are renowned for their use of mosaics, a picture made with small pieces of tile (called tesserae), colored stone or glass. The small pieces are bonded often to a wall in a pattern to create a larger image. The final mosaic usually displays a lack of movement in the subject matter because of the slow application of the small pieces.

In the early years of Duccio's career it is often speculated that he had a teacher. It is not certain with whom he studied, but historians believe that it may have been Cavallini Di Pepo, who also known as Cimabue.

All these influences had helped Duccio attain certain stylistic traits that are found on the Madonna and Child. For example, the subtle folds of the Madonna's

clothing that cover her body. This technique is called *chiaroscuro*, which is derived from the Italian term for light and dark. In order to achieve this technique the artist would have to apply one shade of paint next to the darker shade to create an illusion of spatial depth. Duccio also uses the technique of cropping very subtly in the Madonna and Child. To crop an image is considered a modern technique that artists use, yet the way it is used on the Madonna and Child is very subtle. To achieve this technique the image must be painted to appear close, in order for particular sections of the painting not to be visible in the over all space. In the case of the Madonna and Child, the Virgin Mary's lower body is not shown in the panel. Duccio also crops the low wall that would guard the Virgin Mary from a sudden drop, called a parapet, painted at the bottom of the panel. The use of the parapet is possibly evidence of Giotto's influence as well on Duccio's paintings. Duccio unquestionably knew of Giotto's work, and the illusionistic parapet is adopted from the Florentine painter's experiment in his frescoes at Assisi. Giotto Di Bondone (1266 - 1337) was also a successful Italian artist, who is today considered to be one of the innovators of early Renaissance style. The naturalistic style of Giotto's work was part of the rebirth of classical styles dating back to the Roman Empire.

Duccio also uses the classic golden background made famous by Byzantine artists in his Madonna and Child. The condition of the paint is a testament to the techniques of the Renaissance painters. As artists experimented with different media, tempera paints, which are used in Duccio's works, became less popular. The use of oil paints gave the artist the advantage of layering the paint and to be able to rework areas in their paintings because oil paints dried more slowly than tempera. The gradual drying process also allowed artists to blend colors much more successfully.

## **Conclusion**

Duccio's talent, along with all these technological advancements in art, allowed him to create works such as the Madonna and Child and numerous altarpieces. Also, his influences affected his work greatly. From the research conducted there were certain relevant bits of information that came to light that may not be familiar to followers of Duccio's artwork.

Like most artists Duccio was influenced by his environment and artwork produced by his peers. The influence of Giotto and Cimabue has become much more apparent after examining their works and the relationships they may have had with one another. Duccio's influences also date back to the classical period, a period in time that still has great influence on our modern society.

My familiarity about the period of time when this piece was created came from a course I recently took where we discussed Renaissance art (Art 34). Vocabulary terms such

as tempera, indulgences, mosaics and the names of prolific artists were introduced to the students in the course. My knowledge of different historical styles which I acquired through the course made the information that I found in the research much more meaningful to me.

In conclusion, the Madonna and Child by Duccio represents much more than an image of the Virgin Mary and Jesus; rather it is a product of a thriving period in art and history that we are continuously learning from. We New Yorkers are fortunate to have this painting in our city.

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*The Jewish woman, however, is seen in a more equal light than the Hindu woman. The Hindu woman is “claimed” by her husband and the Jewish woman is accomplishing her duty by marrying and passing down the Jewish faith and tradition to a new generation in the eyes of God. Yet, from my analysis, the fact that women are seen as “different” in their duties shows that equality has not yet broken through the framework of culture and religion.*

## To Be Wed: Comparing Jewish and Hindu Weddings

Gloria Tsirelman

SOC 39

Fall 2005

Mentor: Professor Barbara Walters

For many years, generations of people from different cultures, races and religions have brought together their families in the joyful teary-eyed festivity which celebrates the new union between a man and a woman. In the melting pot of America, wedding ceremonies from every religion imaginable are held every day. Though they vary in customs, proceedings and even color, they share one thing in common. Each has a bride, a groom, and starry-eyed family members who look on nostalgically, perhaps reminiscing about their own wedding years ago. Beautiful as the ceremonies are, different religious and ethnic groups have their own unique way to go about the celebration but, underneath the festivities, gender and biases could arise. This paper compares this one important ritual in the context of two different religions in America: Judaism and Hinduism.

### Hindu Weddings

To have a better appreciation of the rituals in these religions, one must first understand the basis of each. Hinduism is quite a fascinating religion and amazing in its belief in an ultimate deity which exists in all life. This is supported in an article by Marilyn Adamson. Adamson (1996) writes, “Most Hindus worship one being of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through infinite representations of gods and goddesses, over 300,000 of them, and a Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma to be free from continuous reincarnations.”

Adamson (1996) goes on to say, “There are three possible ways to end this cycle of karma: 1) be lovingly devoted to any of the Hindu gods or goddesses; 2) grow in knowledge through meditation of Brahman (oneness), to realize that circumstances in life are not real, that selfhood is an illusion and only Brahman is real; and 3) be dedicated to various religious ceremonies and rites.”

Another important component of Hindu belief is the emphasis on gender roles in this religion. As in many groups, women are not looked upon as pillars of strength. In fact, they are seen as quite fragile and in need of security and protection in order to fulfill their jobs of raising a family. Even in modern Hindu societies, chastity is still regarded as extremely important. However, traditionally, as one article describes, “...women were often married very early, to protect their chastity and because women were considered to mature much quicker than young men. So-called child marriage was often akin to a system of betrothal and marriage was only consummated when the bride reached adulthood” (Vivaha: Marriage 2004).

In addition, there was an emphasis on what caste one is born in to, or what we would call “class.” One born into a higher caste would usually not marry someone from a lower caste. “Vivaha: Marriage” emphasizes that, “marriage was usually between members of the same *varna*, and the same *jati* (occupational sub-group). Scripture approved of a woman accepting a partner from a higher *varna* but the opposite was shunned. Men in some *varnas* could accept more than one wife provided they could adequately maintain them.” Today most marriages are monogamous, and some are still arranged.

The ritual itself is quite a colorful and lively celebration that could bedazzle any onlooker. However, since America has such a diverse population, even people with the same religion, yet who come from different regions in India vary in “language, food, practices.” Sharbari Bose explains what Hindu priests in the U.S have done to solve this problem:

“In the U.S., Hindu priests have standardized the wedding ceremony to avoid conflicts when the families of the bride and groom are from different Indian regions. If the families wish, they can pick and choose from local traditions to enhance this basic format, says Dr. Anand Mohan, a professor of religion and philosophy at City College in Queens, NY, and a Hindu priest.”

The most common ceremony that is performed in the Hindu tradition is the “Vedic” ceremony, which is named “after the Vedas, or ancient Hindu scriptures.” Usually before the ceremony, the bride has a series of brilliant artwork painted on her hands and feet called “mehendi.” This is done not only for weddings. Many times I would marvel at my friend Lalita who would come into school with decorative art on her palms during other various Hindu holidays. I always thought they were beautiful, adding a type of mysterious splendor to one who wears this art. However it is mandatory that Mahendi be done for the wedding because it symbolizes a passage from one area of life, into another.

Sharbibi Bose describes the proceedings of the Hindu ceremony step by step. “The ceremony begins with a prayer to Lord Ganesha. Salutations are offered so that Ganesha [god of success, wisdom and power] may remove all obstacles during the couple’s married life.” Raksha bandhan comes next and cords are tied to the wrists of both the bride and the groom. Marriage is considered to be an arduous stage in life, and the cords are meant as protection. Kanya Daan refers to the “giving away” of the bride to the groom. “... During the ceremony, the father of the bride places his daughter’s hands into the groom’s hands as a gesture of giving her away. (Again this points out that the woman is an “object” first possessed by her father, who kept her

protected in early life, and now by her husband). In the Hindu tradition, no man can *claim* a woman until she is offered.”

Maharat is another interesting detail. Before the wedding, “an auspicious time is fixed for the event. Using the bride and groom’s dates of birth, astrologists calculate the position of planets and stars to reflect the celestial union of the couple. During the ceremony, the *Gautra* of both bride and groom (going back at least three generations) are announced. A *Gautra* is the ancestral lineage or the ancestor’s original clan (this is not related to caste or religion). In Hindu law, marriages should not take place within the same clan” (Bose). This is a procedure done to make sure that the bloodlines between the bride and groom are not linked in any way.

After the announcement of the *Gautra*, “the bride and groom exchange garlands” in a procedure titled *Garlanding*. This expresses the desire of the couple to marry each other. In the U.S., the ring ceremony usually follows” (Bose). The next procedure is entitled *Mangal Sutra*. During the *Mangal Sutra*, “the groom places a necklace of black and gold beads on the bride, a custom that came about relatively recently. Traditionally, the goddess Laxmi is invoked in the *Mangal Sutra* and the bride is said to receive blessings throughout her marriage”(Bose). Next is the *Homam*. “In the center of the *mandap*, or wedding altar, a fire is kindled. A Hindu marriage is a sacrament, not a contract. To signify the viability of the ceremony, fire is kept as a witness and offerings are made. The bride’s brother gives three fistfuls of puffed rice to the bride as a wish for his sister’s happy marriage. Each time, the bride offers the rice to the fire” (Bose).

The next proceeding is called *Sapta Padi*. In South India, the couple walks seven steps together to signify their friendship. In the North, each round is a specific blessing they request of the gods. The main significance is establishing friendship since friendship is the basis of a Hindu marriage. *Sindhoo Daan* is what follows. “*Sindhoo* is a red powder, which is placed in the parting of the bride’s hair. It is outward evidence of her married status” (Bose). Last but not least “a priest’s blessings conclude the ceremony and the reception follows with dances and feasts. I remember this from the video I was shown years ago by an Indian friend. I heard the roar of applause as the bride and groom took their first steps as husband and wife, followed by images of hungry guests happily eating delicacies. After having their fill, the guests joined one another in traditional dances and surrounded the bride and the groom in the center, who gleamed with joy.

### Jewish Weddings

Like Hinduism, Judaism is an ancient and interesting religion. However, unlike the former, it is a monotheistic religion and only worships one god in one form. It is similar to a Brahman, but in essence is more general and broader. Thus, the Jewish wedding ceremony is done under God's eyes watching over and blessing the new union. Lisa Katz explains that "Judaism sees marriage as a fusion of the souls, a partnership for life. Rabbinic tradition teaches that a marriage will only be peaceful if God is a part of the union." Furthermore, there is a difference in gender roles in Judaism as well. However, unlike in Hinduism, Jewish women are not seen as fragile but as different important "equals."

Many of my own parents' colleagues are religious Jews and value their women highly. Thus, although it may often seem this way to outsiders, the Jewish woman does not necessarily walk in the shadow of her husband, but rather by his side as a companion with a different role in life. As my father's friend Rob Steinburg told me when I asked him what he thought of religion and women's roles, "Yes my wife stays at home with my children and takes care of them, but that is the will of God. Her duties as a mother are of no less importance than my duties as an employee." Then he motioned me to come closer and whispered into my ear, "Women are our pillars of strength. Who do you think keeps this head from tilting too far sideways?"

Tracey R. Rich echoes Steinberg's statement. "In traditional Judaism, the primary role of a woman is as wife and mother, keeper of the household. However, Judaism has great respect for the importance of that role and the spiritual influence that the woman has over her family. The Talmud says that when a pious man marries a wicked woman, the man becomes wicked, but when a wicked man marries a pious woman, the man becomes pious."

Thus, the partnership between a man and a woman in marriage is regarded very highly in Judaism. Also, Judaic law "prohibits sex outside the context of marriage," as many religions do. Chastity is heavily valued in many parts of the world, and even today in modern times, my own Jewish female friends whose parents are not orthodox tell them to "preserve themselves" until they marry. However, the Jewish wedding ritual itself is quite wonderful and festive, although not nearly as colorful as the Hindu ceremony. The bride typically wears white. Traditionally this symbolized virginity but now, most American Jewish brides wear white because they are brought up with "Cinderella" gown imagery as little girls. In Hinduism, the dress is red to symbolize love and life, for white symbolizes death.

The ritual proceedings of the Jewish ceremony are explained by Lisa Katz. First the marriage contract, called a kettubah, must be signed before the wedding can begin. “The rabbi explains the terms of the ketubah to the groom. The groom agrees to be bound by the terms of the ketubah by the symbolic act of holding the corner of a handkerchief which the rabbi extends to him. Then the witnesses sign the ketubah.

“The ketubah specifies the mutual obligations of the bride and the groom. Usually the bride and the groom would not have seen one another for three days or so before the wedding, and the bedekin following the ketubah is usually done depending on how traditional the bride and groom are. Bedekin refers to the veiling of the bride. “After the groom covers the bride’s face with the veil, she will continue to stay veiled until the seven benedictions are read under the chuppah” (Katz).

The chuppah resembles a gazebo, and symbolizes “the home to be built and shared by the couple.” The bedkin comes next where the bride continues to be veiled until she is inside the chuppah. The purpose of the bedekin is that “...the groom checks his bride to make sure he will marry the right woman. It is a tradition based on the story of Yaacov, Rachel and Leah. Yaacov worked for Lavon for seven years to earn the right to marry Lavon’s daughter Rachel. When it was time for the wedding, Lavon veiled his other daughter Leah and tricked Yaacov into marrying the wrong daughter. Yaacov had to work another seven years before Lavon would agree to give him his other daughter Rachel” (Katz).

Once they are under the chuppah, some brides will circle around their groom. Some circle three times. “This tradition comes from Hosea 2:21-22 where God says to the Jewish people: “I betroth you to myself forever; I betroth you to myself in righteousness and in justice, in love and in mercy; I betroth you to myself in faithfulness.” Others circle seven times: “As Joshua circled the wall of Jericho seven times, and then the walls fell down. So, too, after the bride walks around the groom seven times, the walls between them will fall and their souls will be united.”

Next, both the bride and the groom are given two glasses of wine to sip from. Andy Shulman explains the significance of one of the cups. “The first cup accompanies the betrothal blessings, and after these are recited, the couple drinks from the cup. Wine, a symbol of joy in Jewish tradition, is associated with the Kiddush, the sanctification prayer recited on Shabbat and festivals. Marriage, which is called Kiddushin, is the sanctification of a man and woman to each other.”

After the drinking the wine, the couple will place rings on each other’s fingers. “The wedding ring symbolizes many things. First, it is a symbol of attachment

and fidelity. It also symbolizes money. Jewish tradition says that the groom must buy the ring with his own money. The ring also symbolizes a chain that unites generations. The hope is that the couple will start a family and thereby add another link to the chain of Jewish history” (Shulman). The groom places the ring on the bride’s finger while repeating the prayer that the rabbi tells him and then the bride does the same. Right after that is the reading of the ketubah. “The reading of the Ketubah acts as a break between the first part of the ceremony ~ Kiddushin (betrothal), and the latter part ~ Nissuin (marriage). The document is signed by two witnesses, and is a legally binding agreement. The Ketubah is the property of the kallah (bride) and she must have access to it throughout their marriage. It is often written amidst beautiful artwork, to be framed and displayed in the home” (Shulman).

After the reading of the Ketubah, seven benedictions are said over a second glass of wine. The last part of the seven benedictions asks God to comfort Zion, cause happiness for the young couple, and restore Judea and Jerusalem. Here we see that the marriage ceremony combines individual and communal hopes. Both the bride and groom drink from this second glass of wine” (Katz)

The last but not least step of the ceremony is the breaking of the glass. The type of glass used is very important for it has to be fine enough to break. A good friend of mine who worked in a restaurant once accidentally placed the wrong type of glass in the towel. This resulted in the husband-to-be having a very troublesome time trying to break it and concluded in his embarrassment. During the breaking of the glass with his foot, the groom uses a glass covered with white lining. “This custom is derived from the Talmud. It is written that a rabbi broke a vase during a wedding feast in order to warn those present against excessive joy. Even during times of great joy, we should remember the tragic destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem” (Shulman).

Before festivities begin, the bride and the groom “retire to a private room, called Heder Yichud, to "consummate" the marriage. Today this is a time when the bride and groom take a few moments to just be with each other before going to greet all the wedding guests at the party” (Katz).

After reading over the marriage ceremonies, I noticed that both religions place marriage on a high pedestal, and that their rituals bind both the bride and groom in a spiritual union. In Hinduism, the world itself is seen as a “false reality” and that only the purpose for marriage is to love “selflessly,” thus doing good for the spiritual self. Judaism also attributes marriage to spirituality, but it is more grounded. The ceremony does not put as much emphasis on the afterlife as it does on the present. However, in both religions, women seem to give up their individuality, as their roles

become to be good mothers and caregivers to the family. Mahendi in Hinduism, an art done on the women's hands and feet, fades and ultimately disappears as the weeks pass by. However, the red marking on her forehead which she is given as a permanent marking of marriage she wears for the rest of her life. Orthodox Jewish women are marked in their own way. Although their marking is not as visible as the Hindu woman's, they can no longer leave the house without wearing a wig.

It is a bit unnerving. Although one tries to remain as neutral as possible, it is very apparent that even in a modern society such as America, these markings or symbols of marriage are still very effective. They show that although the women's movement has opened up new opportunities for women of every race, religion and culture, when it comes to religion certain rites of passage, such as marriage, still mark the woman as a property and romanticize heterosexual bonding for life.

The Jewish woman, however, is seen in a more equal light than the Hindu woman. The Hindu woman is "claimed" by her husband and the Jewish woman is accomplishing her duty by marrying and passing down the Jewish faith and tradition to a new generation in the eyes of God. Yet, from my analysis, the fact that women are seen as "different" in their duties shows that equality has not yet broken through the framework of culture and religion. However, in practice, as Kathleen Bradley states, "...according to Jewish law, the primary reason for marriage is companionship." Whereas in Hinduism "...by marrying, couples are fulfilling both a social duty – to their families and the larger society – and a sacred duty."

### Observing

I attended a Jewish wedding ceremony recently at a restaurant called Orion Palace on McDonald Avenue. The bride is my mother's cousin, who is not at all religious, although her husband and his family are. [My family stems from communist Odessa and they lived their whole lives told to conceal the fact that they were Jewish. Over time any Jewish values disintegrated, and they grew up merely as Russians.] Being "neutral" religiously myself, my mind is open for observation without placing too much of an emphasis on personal values.

The wedding I had attended, since the bride was not religious, had allowed the groom's family to include all their religious necessities in the ceremony. When we entered the chapel, the men were given cupolas to place onto their heads. This symbolizes a type of respect towards God, who is looking down on the ceremony and its participants. After an appetizer, we took a seat and waited for the ceremony to begin.

I remember distinctly the sound of the rabbi's voice as he slowly walked into the restaurant singing prayers in Hebrew. He had a beautiful operatic voice that vibrated through your whole body and I could feel the importance of what he was singing in the octaves. Eventually, families and friends of the bride and groom were announced as they walked down the aisle. Soon a little rosy-cheeked girl with a basket of flowers walked by, crying the whole way as she threw petals onto the ground. When it came time for the bride, we all stood and welcomed the twenty-four-year-old beauty who walked down the aisle with her white sparkling Cinderella gown trailing close behind her, over the scattered rose petals the flower girl had thrown a few minutes earlier.

The bride circled around the groom seven times, they completed the ritual of the drinking of wine and the stomping of glass was followed by a roar of applause. The guests were then escorted into the dining area where, after a few toasts, the music roared and the bride and groom were lifted high on two chairs. Up and down they bobbed, the whole time holding hands and laughing until tears rolled down the bride's cheeks. During the festivities, I discovered something very interesting taking place among the two families, which was not entirely pleasant. While taking photographs, I overheard different conversations. It astonished me, the amount of snickering and bickering going on between the two families, as both insulted the other's level of religion. There were comments such as "why didn't she choose one of our own?" and "why can't they learn to *value* their religion?"

We are of the same blood and we are human beings before we are Jews. How could there be peace between different religions when we are fostering biases within our own groups? Old mindsets are very difficult to change. Although it was unnerving to observe this, it was understandable as well as informative. However, there is hope, as Mahatma Gandhi once said: "As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world - that is the myth of the atomic age - as in being able to remake ourselves." Thus, when we start embracing our fellow human being as just that, regardless of what level of religiosity he is, then we might achieve many great things.

In conclusion, although different in proceedings, decoration and tradition the Hindu and Jewish wedding rituals go about blessing and establishing this new "partnership" in different ways. Both are a celebration of a new union. They each bring or revive old traditions that are shared even by those who are not religious. The rituals instill a kind of peaceful stability and nostalgia in the hearts of both newlyweds and onlookers, whether they believe in the significance or not. Ultimately, the joy of most guests is the same in both religions. Both the video of the Hindu wedding I

watched years ago and the Jewish wedding I attended last month had people smiling and dancing. They clapped and clapped with blessing, hope, joy and maybe apprehension for the futures of both couples.

However, even in the bliss of ceremony between the same religions, deep rooted biases can seep in, causing a dark underlining and perhaps a foretelling of future disputes. In the end we are but human beings and the traditions that are woven deep within our minds along with the biases are difficult to break. Whether in marriage or not, whether in Hinduism or Judaism, until we embrace one another as mere human equals, then and only then can equality in religion, as well as genders, truly be established. The glimmer and shimmer of tradition and ritual will cover the issues with its festive silk abode as we continue to clap and dance the problems away into oblivion.

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Marriage	Judaism	Hinduism
ultimate purpose of marriage: to free oneself from continuous reincarnation	00	01
ultimate purpose of marriage: to fulfill god's wishes and pass on tradition through children	01	00
place importance on chastity	1/2	01
arranged marriage	00	01
dowry	00	01
dress color:		
white	01	00
red	00	01
symbols of marriage:		
wig	01	00
Mahendi	00	01
women's role in marriage:		
caregiver	01	01
child bearer	01	01
Husband's equal but different companion	01	00
Difficulty in marriage. Different level of religi-	01	01



*Together, the working class and other popular classes forgot their collective pain and frustration by making fun of their “enemies” and themselves in order to reclaim happiness and hope. The feeling of alienation, widely accepted among social scientists as one of the social and psychological consequence of industrialization, can be counted as one of the “enemies” as well.*

## **U**ruguayan Murga: A Montevidean Invention or Simultaneous Evolution?

Luis Mario GOUDSCHAAL  
SOC 32  
Spring 2005  
Mentor: Professor Ilsa Glazer

**U**ruguayan Murga is a form of popular and urban artistic expression performed during the Uruguayan Carnival. It combines street theater, dance and singing (tends to be nasal and loud) in a unique style. Contrapuntal chorus singing is its defining characteristic. When you hear a Murga chorus, you can recognize it immediately: two or more (up to six) melodically independent but consonant vocal parts are executed by the *segundas* (bass singers) *primeras* (tenors) and *sobreprimas* (counter-tenors). The seventeen chorus members, usually male, wear colorful costumes and paint their faces. One of them is the *Director* (conductor), who might use a guitar, and three of them are the percussionists, who stand behind the choir on one side.

The objective of a Murga performance is the parody of the local or national reality—social, political, and sport events of the year— while denouncing social injustice and bringing a message of hope. Therefore, the lyrics are created by the Murgas while the music used is a composite of easily recognized tunes. The average duration of a performance is 40 minutes.

The performance structure of contemporary Murga is the result of more than 100 years of active evolution. It consists of distinct sections:

- 1) *Presentación* o *Saludo*, a highly energetic opening song as introduction;
- 2) A proposal related to what happened during the year, consisting of two subparts:
  - a) *Cuplé*, where the main parody-message is presented; and
  - b) *Popurrí*, where the most important social, political, and sport events of the year are addressed quick and briefly one after another; and
- 3) *Retirada*, a nostalgic good-bye with the promise of coming back next year.

The **Uruguayan Carnival** is held every year in February. It lasts over a month in Montevideo, where the festivity has been experiencing a process of professionalization. In the rest of the country, the celebration varies in duration and quality. More generally, Carnival consists of parades, **Tablado** performances, and displays of the broad cultural heritage from Africa and Europe. **Tablado** refers not only to the outdoor stage constructed specifically for Carnival where all group-categories perform, but also to all theatrical and commercial infrastructures. When you think about a *Tablado*, you think about: carnival group performances; audiences from all ages, including families coming together; and people sharing the traditional beverage *mate* (a South American infusion, like tea) during the show, or sausage sandwich stands with their characteristic smoke and smell. There are many Tablados in Montevideo, where almost half of the population lives. Traditionally, Tablados have been organized both in Montevideo and the rest of the country by neighbors or social/sport clubs, sometimes with the help of the City Hall.

**Comparsa** could be considered as the ancestor of all artistic manifestations of

Carnival in Uruguay. The original scenario for the *Comparsas* was the Carnival parade. When the *Tablados* were well established in Montevideo, the different styles were so evident that stylistic categories started to appear. The main two categories were defined by the ethnic origins of their members or their cultural heritage: a) *Murgas* would be “European” while b) *Comparsas de Negros y Lubolos* would be “African,” with half of its dozens of members (males) playing the Afro-Uruguayan rhythm *Candombe* and half (male and female) dancing. A *Murga* typically is performed on a *Tablado* while *Comparsas* is part of a parade. I am an expert in *Murga*, having been involved for 10 years; I currently perform *Murga* for the United Nations.

### Introduction

While in the capital city of Fray Bentos, of the Department of Río Negro, Uruguay in January 1999 and on my way to one of the last rehearsals of the *Murga*, “Golpe y Quedo,” before the local Carnival inauguration, I stopped by to talk briefly with an “old man.” He was a very nice and sociable neighbor, probably in his 90’s. Knowing that I was going to a rehearsal by the *Murga* costume I was carrying, he told me that when he was a teenager he was also a member of a *Murga*. Noting my surprise, he added “and when I joined it back then, there had been *Murgas* already for a long time!”

I had been living in Fray Bentos for less than a year, with little knowledge of the city, having been and raised in Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay. In my eyes, Cardona represented the “rest of the country,” or the *Interior*, as it is called in Uruguay. Since I had witnessed Carnival in Montevideo each February while I was living there, and the virtual lack of it in Cardona, I unconsciously assumed the truth of a widely believed “myth” ~ that “Uruguayan Carnival” is basically a synonym of “Montevidean Carnival.” The literature regarding this myth relates the story that the first *Murga* in Uruguayan territory was performed by a Spanish Company of Zarzuelas from Cadiz that was visiting Montevideo in 1908. Because of their failure as zarzuela’s performers, the members of the company decided to do a street *Murga* performance, apparently an act from their zarzuela play. The performance was so successful that from then on Montevideans (with a strong Spanish heritage) adopted it as their own. According to the myth, in a relatively short period of time *Murga* became the most important manifestation of the Uruguayan Carnival, spreading only later and partially to the Interior.

Today, alternative stories of *Murga*’s origins are also accepted. My problem with the alternative stories is that they challenge only the mythological first *Murga* without considering the Interior, which is never perceived as a place of creativity and innovation. Perceiving the Interior as a place of genesis contradicts the taken-for-granted sensibilities. In other words, both sides of the debate continue to think about *Murga* in terms of the diffusion of a Montevidean phenomenon. For that reason, I wanted to elaborate on what could be a basis for a more comprehensive challenge to the myth, intending not only to include the Interior in the story, but also the broader context of economic, social, and political changes within the framework of the industrialization era.

I begin by asking why the phenomenon of *Murga* is strongly rooted in many

cities —as Fray Bentos and Montevideo— and not at all in many others — such as Cardona. This is, a phenomenon spread throughout the country but in a patterned way within a society that considers itself racially and ethnically integrated. I here argue that there were certain necessary conditions that acted as a catalyst for the consolidation of the phenomenon in many cities: a port-industrial city context with a significant working class, the existence of an organized Carnival, and high levels of Spanish immigration.

### Myth and Debate

According to Gustavo Diverso, who favors the myth of Montevidean origins, it was only a fact that occurred by “chance, which could have happened during any other period of our cultural history: a few Uruguayans in the mood of imitating a Spanish artistic manifestation was enough so that Murgas became one of the most important popular expressions” (Goldman).

The book *Carnaval – Segunda Parte: Carnaval y Modernización*, by Milita Alfaro, was a major step forward and deserves summary here, not only because of the extensive research of original documents presented in the text (mostly Montevidean press articles from the 1870s to the beginning of the 1900s), but also because it represents one of the cornerstones of this essay’s hypothesis. The book covers the Montevidean Carnival as a whole from the year 1873 to 1903. Presenting a broad context for the festival, Alfaro recognizes new elements of the Carnival itself that were essential for the development of the Uruguayan Murga style, although this is peripheral to her main thesis. Alfaro accepts the myth of Montevidean origins as valid because it represents a different form of truth invented by the society to give more cohesion and sense to its own identity. She asserts: “But also true is this other alternative story, the real one, which allows the discovery of the genesis of the Murga in the old Comparsas of the XIX century” (Alfaro, 225). The author refers to the different elements that along the period of the last 30 years of the XIX century started to appear in many Comparsas, consolidating later in characteristics that became typical of a Murga and its environment. The following are some of these characteristics identified in the book:

1. the first **professional writer** appears in 1871.
2. The appearance of **rehearsals** in around 1900(*El Día*, of 23 February 1898: 38).
3. **Performance structure**: what is called *Brindis* at the end of many Comparsas is reminiscent of the concept of *Despedida* and of a *Cuplé* from the Comparsa “Habitantes de Vilardebó” (referring to mentally disordered patients of that institution) which appears in 1878 shows the characteristic elements of parody and political denouncement.
4. **Tablado**. Alfaro also tracks the appearance of Tablados and Comparsa contests, revealing at the same time the relation with the neighborhoods. Tablado Saroldi, in 1890, was the “first Tablado-neighborhood, meaning that it was organized by the own neighbors’ initiative” (Author Year: 28), and it already included a contest (Author Year: 108).

I would add my opinion that Tablados developed as an extension from the Carnival parades. A parade is not adequate for a Murga. The new need to convey a message required a stage. It was logical that the stage be open (Tablado), as opposed to the usual roofed theater, because this is really just a stop along the parade. To stop is necessary because otherwise the message would not be heard. I doubt that there was ever an intention –in the first decades of this process at least– to separate the stage from the parade. Therefore, the Tablado had to be outdoors. In the same manner as the Murga performer expects the audience to listen to the whole political message, the audience wants to hear and appreciate the presentation completely. The Tablado provides that chance. While still having the ambiance of the parade, it gives the audience an opportunity to appreciate the performance and also has the advantage of being close to home so as to share the event with family, neighbors, and friends. Thus, I argue that Tablados are a vestige of the old Comparsa parades, an extension of the parade or necessary stop to enable the appreciation of a performance. In other words, another fundamental characteristic of the old Carnival was directly appropriated by the Uruguayan Murga.

#### **The Unchallenged myth – Including the Interior in the Story**

First of all, I take in this essay an alternative hypothesis which challenges the myth, that is, the Uruguayan Murga developed by incorporating elements from a Comparsa line of experimentation, adding one element after another in an evolutionary process that began in Montevideo) in the decade of 1870. However, an important element of the myth for this essay is that the Uruguayan Murga is basically a Montevidean phenomenon, and that it was only much later that the influence of the Capital City reached to other cities of the country. The second part of the myth has never been challenged.

Bai and Alfaro(1986: 1) take for granted the second part of the myth, that the Murga developed first in Montevideo. “Through a process of years, carried out by the protagonist [historically famous Murgas, all of which are from Montevideo], the Murga results in that unmistakable Montevidean rhythm of *bombo*, *platillo* and *redoblante* [bass drum, cymbal and snare drum]...” This belief is still present in Alfaro’s book of 1998, and subsequent works do not address the issue. Even when the Interior is mentioned, the reading is “surprising.” Marita Fornaro, for example, although stating that her analysis and investigation “in the field” takes into account the existence of Murgas not only in Montevideo but also in many other cities of the country, she concludes that it has been in existence for “at least fifty years” (Los cantos inmigrantes).

Challenging Fornaro, the following newspapers provide evidence for an earlier existence of Murgas in Fray Bentos in 1917, only eight years after the appearance of the mythological “Gaditana que se va.” Three groups specifically considered as “Murga” are mentioned in the newspaper *La Campaña* as the ones that participated in that year Carnival of Fray Bentos: “La Chirola”, “La Alpargata”, and “Los Cuervos” (Canzani; García). The fact that the source refers to three groups suggests that there were earlier Murgas. This is in keeping with the oral transmission through my “old man” friend, who reported that there were Murgas long before his involvement in the 1920s at the age of 16. Furthermore, if the hypothesis of an evolutionary Murga is true, the earlier

origins are also suggested by another report of *La Campaña*, which mentions a number of Comparsas that appeared in the Carnival of 1907: “La Alegría,” “Los Artesanos,” “La Estudiantina,” “Los Pom Pom,” “Los Colonos Emigrantes,” “Los Hijos del Sol,” “El Oso,” “Berequetun,” and “La Tigra” (García).

Fornaro also indicated that she could successfully track the influence of the Montevidean model in other cities, and from these cities to smaller towns, citing as evidence what veteran members of Murgas from Mercedes, Department of Soriano, told her: “We get the tapes from Montevideo, and then the Murgas of smaller cities copy from us.” Equally surprising is her description of the present Murgas of the Interior, which she claims are far from caring about contest scores and rules because of their informality. Murgas in the Interior, she argues, are about having fun (Los cantos inmigrantes). As a former member of a couple of Murgas in Fray Bentos that were competing locally and in other cities of the Interior, I can assure that nothing is further from reality than such a statement. The true members of Murga groups would give anything in order to win, as if it were a sport championship. Furthermore, most Murgas of the Interior involve huge efforts to plan and organize the group. This includes collecting money and rehearsing during one to three months previous to the beginning of the Carnival, and in some cases even longer. For instance, Murga “La Redoblona” of Fray Bentos had been rehearsing at least since July 2002, featuring an impressive management in its organization and task subdivision, and winning first place everywhere the Murga contested during that Carnival of 2003. The same year, Murga “Golpe y Quedo,” also from Fray Bentos and also moved by the same winning desire, acquired a relatively enormous debt that have so far prevented the group from participating again. Obviously, these examples show not only that Murgas of the Interior do not care merely about having some fun, but also that some authors/researchers have greatly underestimated the issue.

### **The Social Science Approach – The Necessary Elements**

If we embrace the evolutionary Murga hypothesis and agree that different economic, social, and political elements affect the experimentation/creation and development of the phenomenon in Montevideo, then we could agree also on that a similar outcome might result **whenever and wherever** such elements are present. Therefore, let us use the anthropological concept of “universal social institutions,” which states that all human societies are organized into social institutions that answer basic human needs. The basic four groups are: economic, political, kinship, and religious institutions. All social institutions are integrated, which means that each one fits the others. For that reason, the change in one will affect the others. The will to change of some and/or the resistance to any change by others produces conflict (Glazer 5).

The last three centuries’ changes and conflicts on the global level have been unprecedented. The fundamental cause was the overwhelming wave (better if compared to a tsunami) of the Industrial Revolution. Societies of the world have since then been experimenting and constantly rearranging their institutions. For instance, the

Industrial Revolution initiated new impetus for imperialism/colonialism because of the industrialized countries need to seek out new sources of raw material to supply their factories (Glazer 138-144; Cf. Marx 1868). While Africa and Asia were subjected to imperialism/colonialism in its “pure” form (direct political control of the territories), the “independent” countries of South America were likewise subjected to neocolonialism. The Uruguayan societies of the end of the XIX century and beginning of the XX century were part of these global trends.

For these reasons, I disagree with the emphasis that author Milita Alfaro gives to the role responsibility and consciousness of the Uruguayan elite in creating a meticulous plan for the artistic changes. The real generator of the change was beyond the ideology, attitudes, desires, and even will of the elite. They were also “victims” of the “tsunami.” It might have worked in their favor —and certainly they were instrumental— but it was not their decision. The “decision” was made in Europe by a capitalist industrial system that became the dominant system in the world. The neocolonialism is reflected in the famous the statement by the Uruguayan President Mr. Herrera y Obes in 1890 when referring to his feeling of being a mere “manager of a company’s ranch with its headquarters in London” (Alfaro 200).

Translated to the specific essay’s matter of Murga-rooted cities, I state that the determining factor is first of all a question of the economic base of each Uruguayan city and resistance to encroaching industrialization. I support this thesis with a factual observation: the more rural the economic base, the more remote the chances have been for the Murga phenomenon to take root in the cities. That would explain why Cardona, a city that has always been a center for the rural economic activities of its region, never embraced a Murga kind of expression but kept “loyal” to more traditional country-folkloric ones. By the same token: the more industrial the economic base of a city, the greater the chances to adopt Murga as its popular artistic expression. That would explain why Fray Bentos, a city brought into existence because of a single industry and most likely because of a single factory, embraced Murgas early. The same explanation works perfectly for Montevideo, which obviously developed the most diversified industrial economy of the country. If we mapped every Uruguayan city, we would find a phenomenon spread throughout the country but with all kind of degree variations of intensity. The following examines each of the conditions I have identified as essential for the flourishing of Murga.

#### a) **Port-industrial City**

Geographically, a navigable river was an important consideration for big factories to become established, because shipping was the best means of distributing products both internally and abroad. That was the case for the Murga-rooted cities of Salto, Paysandú, Fray Bentos, Nueva Palmira, Juan Lacaze, among others. Juan Lacaze, a small city located on the River Plate coast, had a relatively important number of large factories. Even though these factories have disappeared, it remains a Murga-rooted city due in part to the legacy of its once industrial character. A similar thing happened in Fray Bentos although the city depended on one single factory. When the plant closed, the consequences were catastrophic. Fray Bentos’ history is one of the best examples of industrial capitalism gone awry, combined with the new imperialism/colonialism in the Uruguayan territory.

### b) The Emergence of an Urban Working class

The industrial era brought factories, which in turn brought about a completely different way of life from those of pre-industrial cities and farming villages. In the frame of this new urban lifestyle, we find the fundamental link connecting the Industrial Revolution with the Murga phenomenon: the working class. When asked who were behind the murgas, both creating and supporting them, veteran Murga member Antoñito Iglesias said “historically, Murga is link with the working class and the most modest sectors of the population” (Bai and Alfaro Year). Furthermore, it seems that wherever was a factory, there was a Murga. Therefore, the social origin of the traditional Murga member is the working class provides both the actors who carry on the concept of Murga and the audience who celebrate it. Why?

We should address this new social class as a new subculture, which, beyond the division of labor, identified with the same needs and the same “enemy.” The capitalist, or “owners of the means of production” in the word of Marx, were the perceived enemies because of the disproportional power over the employees. Unions were the only chance to channel their struggle. However, both the Unions and the political parties identified with the working class struggle used an international Marxist language. Carnival was suddenly an opportunity to express what the popular classes had to say in their own “language.” Interesting, the “left” was against Carnival in general, as documented in Alfaro’s *Carnaval – Segunda Parte*, because it considered it a waste of energy and an unfortunate temporary stop of the struggle (Alfaro Year: 171).

Because the Murga used an authentic working class sociolinguistic style and socially relevant thematic content, the audience that could identify with it was also the working class. The following anecdote clarifies by contrast: Playing a couple of songs in a traditional rural celebration called “*criollas*,” I could “feel” the distance between rural and urban artistic expression. Not even my most folkloric versions were appropriate enough in that environment. I realized that there was a Uruguayan multiculturalism defined mainly by the location/ occupation of its citizens. Language, forms and style of “their” folk music reflects nature and work in their rural environment, which means that they can mirror themselves with it.

Together, the working class and other popular classes forgot their collective pain and frustration by making fun of their “enemies” and themselves in order to reclaim happiness and hope. The feeling of alienation, widely accepted among social scientists as one of the social and psychological consequence of industrialization, can be counted as one of the “enemies” as well. This is both the feeling of being lost in a crowd and also the frustration of being a “nobody.” Although Carnival in general can be seen as an opportunity to break this feeling, Murga appears as the perfect antidote for alienation.

Therefore, this medium of communication resulted in a unique combination of protest plus laughing-therapy, which seems to be the recipe embraced by the popular classes that would explain the long life of the Murga phenomenon. Many other categories did not survive because the audience could not personally identify with the performances, even though many are remembered as technically or artistically superior.

### c) A Local Tradition of Organized Carnival

A preexistent context of Carnival with certain degree of organization is necessary for the Murga. The brand new values —usually referred as “civilized”—, imposed by industrialized Europe through its local representatives: the Uruguayan elite, brought an urban way of life completely different from those of pre-industrial cities and farming villages. “The more industrialized, the more organized,” could be the summary sentence of the consequence of those values reflected in the festivity. Furthermore, the wider division of classes derived from the Industrial Revolution was also reflected in the existence of virtually two Carnivals in most cities with industrial economic base: one for the popular classes, and one for the rich.

Although the Montevidean Carnival can be traced long before 1873—the oldest document found is an edict of 1799 from the Governor of Montevideo trying to put an end to the “craziness” of those colonial Carnivals (Monday)— that year represents a clear change from the improvised and kind of violent form of “having fun” to an organized or “civilized” festivity. That year marked the first Official Parade of Comparsas (Alfaro 11). The new Carnival implied the tasks of organizing and financing in order to have fun in a civilized way. A committee of “respectable neighbors” was called to organize the parade. A law was issued by the authority to rule the entire festivity. The police chief wrote in his records after the event that “fortunately, the moderation and good judgment of the people have granted us the standard of the European civilization” (Alfaro 19). Also the press was constantly congratulating the society for its civilized behavior, and constantly comparing the local Carnival with European festivities of Paris or Venice.

### d) Spanish immigration

A global consequence of the Industrial era was a general immigration trend from rural to urban areas where the job’s offer increased. Spain, Italy, and also France provided a huge immigrant population to Uruguayan urban and rural areas during several decades from 1870 and before. For instance, at one point during the XIX century, half of the Montevidean population was born abroad (Alfaro 123). Immigration played an important role in the process of Carnival reform toward the new civilized values (Author 124), and many names of Comparsas suggest the strong presence of Spain and Italy.

To challenge the myth does not have necessarily to mean a denial of the important role that “Murga la Gaditana” from Cadiz might have played in the evolution of the genre. First of all, it seems clear that it sealed definitively the name for it. Secondly, as author Gustavo Diverso affirms in a letter to a web magazine, the newspapers of 1909 talk about the “appearance of a new kind of group,” “a new perspective to see Carnival,” and “a well-done artistic proposal,” referring to the Montevidean “Murga la Gaditana que se va” —which made the imitation of “Murga la Gaditana.” However, Spanish immigrants brought a concept of Murga not exclusively from Cadiz, as Fornaro suggests when stating that “there were Murgas in several regions of Spain —with similarities to both Uruguayan and Andalusian [region where Cadiz is located] Murgas—, and a significant immigration came from all these Spanish regions by the time Murga style was being developed” (Raíces Ibéricas Year: page #).

By the same token, such a concept of Murga could have been taken wherever this Spanish immigration settled, Montevideo or Interior. In Fray Bentos, for instance, the name of the 1907 Comparsa “Los Colonos Emigrantes” is highly suggestive (García); “the last dancing piece to end ‘Las Romerías’ [1879-1924] at midnight around the ‘Quiosco’ [main square] was a ‘jota’ for the Spanish,” who danced and sung it in excitement (S. R. La Armonía 7); and there was an active Italian and Spanish communities nucleated in the respective *Sociedad Italiana de Socorros Mutuos* (Italian Society) and the *Sociedad Española de Socorros Mutuos* (Spanish Society), as it suggests, among others, the 1912 Official Program of the 30<sup>th</sup> *Romerías* (García).

### Conclusions

What is presented in this essay is not enough to determine whether the Montevidean Murga simply influenced the rest of the Murga-rooted cities, or if there was a simultaneous development where the necessary elements were present. Furthermore, important topics as the huge and constant migration of the last 100 years from the Interior to the Capital City were not analyzed in this paper. Such an analysis—especially relevant for the simultaneous development hypothesis—could expand the possibilities and the understanding of the issue focusing in Montevideo as the “mixing-pot” for the ultimate creation of the Uruguayan Murga. This is different ideas, styles and concepts were provided by all Murga-rooted cities and were mixed (mainly through the direct contribution of Murga members coming to Montevideo from the Interior), consolidating into a distinctive Uruguayan Murga-style. It could have been this style that later influenced the Interior when the communication advances created uniformity in the country in general.

What is clear is that there is a huge amount of information waiting for being discovered or rediscovered in all Murga-rooted cities of the Interior. Since Fray Bentos is a relatively new city, it would be very interesting to take older cities—as Rosario (former Coya in colonial times) in the Department of Colonia—to create further comparisons with Montevideo. However, as time goes by the risk of losing crucial information increases.

When I went back to Uruguay for a month-vacation in February 2004, I was anxiously carrying a tape recorder to interview the “old man” Murga member who prompted my curiosity in the first place. When I arrived to Fray Bentos I learned with sad astonishment he had recently died. It is important for the old and the young that the interviews take place before it is too late, because it means an opportunity to fulfill the passing-on role of the older generation and the right and responsibility to know where we come from of the other. In other words, to achieve the generational connection that is essential in any healthy community. I like to think of this paper—I hope only the first of many—not simply as an effort to satisfy my own curiosity but as a contribution aiming to that communitarian goal.

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This paper was condensed and edited from a longer paper by Professor Barbara Walters .





*I picture my mother spending days listening for familiar sounds, helplessly waiting for me to translate for her and my heart starts to tremble. She would not be herself anymore. She would become a shadow of her former self. I know that if my mother ever immigrated to United States, she would go from being independent to being dependent; from helpful to helpless; from outgoing to captive.*

## **Why the Russian Grandmother Cannot Raise her American Grandson**

Alla Pankevich  
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Mentor: Professors Kate Garrettson

In her essay “The Melting Pot,” Anne Fadiman talks about the difficulties and hardships the Hmong had to face when they left Laos. As an example, the author uses the Lee’s family situation to show the reader how a family with traditional structure experienced dramatic cultural dislocation. The grandfather, who used to play the role of head of household back in Laos, switches positions with his twelve-year-old granddaughter when the family immigrates to the United States. The girl is able to adapt to the new culture faster, leaving her grandfather far behind. Anne Fadiman describes it as a “power structure” that “had turned completely upside down.”

The author talks about life of older members of Hmong community who, “only cook Hmong dishes, sing only Hmong songs, play only Hmong musical instruments, tell only Hmong stories, and know far more about current political events in Laos and Thailand than about those in United States,” seventeen years after they arrived. In my mind, I tried to compare the life of Hmong community with people who emigrated from former Soviet Union. Just like the Hmong, older Russians in Brighton Beach only watch their own TV programs. They prefer to eat only familiar foods, and communicate only in Russian with other Russians, while their children are fluent in English, accustomed to American culture and their grandchildren hardly understand Russian. One of the things this essay made me think about is that among all the benefits immigration has to offer to one generation, there are hardships and limitations that the older generation has to overcome in order to keep the family together. People who have the past, not only the future, have to sacrifice their social status and often experience a role loss. They have to give up the roles they played for many years and relationships they created over a long time. They move far away from the hospitals where their children were born and from the graves of their past generations.

Reading Anne Fadiman’s essay also made me think of my own family’s situation where my mother and I live far apart. Although her greatest wish is to be closer to me and my son, the price for it is so high that paying it would mean losing her identity. My mother is a 62-year-old woman, who lived and worked in Moscow, Russia all her life. After completing a college education and earning a degree in chemical engineering in 1964, she got a permanent job in a government institution. While working there she married one of the young engineers-inventors, who later became my father. It was a boring, but steady job with a standard salary and paid vacations. She worked there for the next seventeen years and probably would still be working there if not for my parent’s

deteriorating relationship. In 1980 due to my parent's divorce, one of them had to change his place of work. Since my father's position was much higher than my mother's, it was my mother who started looking for another job.

During the first year she had a few temporarily jobs and seemed to be lost, but in 1981, she was offered the position of administrative director in one of the medical clinics of Moscow. She was given one day to think. My mother had no prior training in management and had never supervised people before, but after a sleepless night of worrying she decided to take a risk and accept the offer.

She was 37 when she started her new career. Because of her hard work, and natural ability to organize and motivate people she was able to "pass the test", and gain the respect of her co-workers, who were critically watching the first steps of their new inexperienced director. It has been 25 years since then and this job became a very big part of my mother's life. She supervises about hundred and fifty people. Among her daily responsibilities is important decision making on how to improve the working environment. She is very well respected by everyone for her dedication, loyalty and fairness.

The way Russians show respect for age and status is by using patronymic, we add the name of the father to the first name of the person who is been addressed. My mother has been called Maya Michailovna for the past twenty-five years. She carefully dresses in the morning and comes to work before anyone else is there. Before she leaves work, she walks through the hallways of the clinic like it is her kingdom. She makes sure the lights are off, and the plants are watered. It is not her responsibility but she always does it. My mother's status doesn't give her wealth, but it gives her a sense of incredible satisfaction and achievement.

My mother is very active; she never misses a theatre premier or an art exhibit. She loves her little apartment and all that surrounds her. She finds something beautiful to do in any weather, at any time of the year. In the winter she skis and takes long walks in the forest. She loves to iron by the window and watch the snow fall. In the spring, when the snow is fully melted, she takes the train to the countryside. She brings her lunch along. While walking to the small Jewish cemetery, my mother always picks some wild flowers. Once there, she settles down by her grandparent's gravesides. First she cleans the head stones and lays the flowers. She spends the rest of the afternoon talking to the people who raised her about all that that happened in the past year. This has been a part of her life since I can remember. When summer comes she opens her dacha, and enjoys every moment of it from washing the wooden floors to the moment when the black currants are ripe and it is time to preserve them for the winter in delicious jam.

I live near Brighton Beach and see women who immigrated to this country from the former Soviet Union every day. I am referring to women who came here later in life, women who followed their children and their families rather than their own dream for better life. When I see them and intentionally overhear their conversations I think of my mother. What would her life here have been like? Would she have made hobby out of choosing the best tomatoes for hours, or talking about her grandson and soap operas on Russian TV nonstop? Would she have made all new friends instead of keeping ones she has had kept since high school?

I picture my mother spending days listening for familiar sounds, helplessly waiting for me to translate for her and my heart starts to tremble. She would not be herself anymore. She would become a shadow of her former self. I know that if my mother ever immigrated to United States, she would go from being independent to being dependent; from helpful to helpless; from outgoing to captive. Bringing my mother here would be like taking the apple tree that grew for sixty two years in the poor soil, without much sun, whose apples are small but very tasty, and planting it somewhere else where the soil is rich and the sun is bright. It would not necessarily make its apples sweeter, but the risk of killing the tree would be tremendous. And who knows if it ever would bear apples again.

Many Russian immigrants who came here had a lot to leave behind in their Motherland. They were stripped of their citizenship. They left their apartments and the roles they played in society, with other citizens. They arrived with the suitcases and memories to reflect on, in the New World. "Their psychological reality is both full and empty. They are 'full' of the past; they are 'empty' of new ideas and life experiences," says Richard Mollica, the psychiatrist who observed Hmong patients, in Anne Fadiman's essay. Although I know the author is talking about the Hmong, I feel that these words could be easily applied to many Russian immigrants and to my mother if she ever decided to immigrate.

I clearly understand that while the quality of life for most immigrants gets better, for many their social roles diminish. The professional roles they played in the past have often been altered to fit their new lives. I have met Doctors who became home attendants and have seen ads by former teachers looking for babysitting jobs. Many engineers who built the great Soviet Union are building the bookshelves in their children's American houses. It is a difficult subject to talk about and an especially hard choice to make.

