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PLAY: A NORMATIVE THEORY OF AGENCY AND CULTURE

by

MAXAIE BELMONT

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2022

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Play: A Normative Theory of Agency and Culture

by

Maxaïe Belmont

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From the beginning, people are introduced to many different attempts at engaging with various “cultures”, and of course, are born into their own. The extant literature of various fields in the social sciences have afforded us the realization that no one culture holds neither moral ground nor blueprint for how to be a culture, as our own culture is one of many, all a part of the world. Yet, because of the way our culture specifies how we are to engage and live, we tend towards the assumption that our culture has monopoly on the definition of culture. The following thesis seeks to engage with this tendency. The thesis argues that a theory of play grounds the understanding of culture. The plays from culture symbolic exemplify aspects from that culture towards any engaged people that act as the catalyst for understanding. Three case studies detailing three accounts of plays will be used to explain why it is through a theory of play that an establishing of new conditions of possibility extends a culture’s existence and how people forge an agency out of local and intracultural narratives. This thesis theorizes the plays from dominated cultures are activities which symbolically exemplify persistence in the face of the plays from dominant cultures, as I further theorize of play as a normative theory of agency and culture.

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I dedicate this thesis to the life and memory of my teacher, Charles W. Mills

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## SECTION I: A DISCUSSION OF RACE'S CONNECTION TO CULTURE

### **Part I: The Plays of Race/ization**

“To theorize the Black body, one must ‘turn to the [Black] body as the radix for interpreting racial experience.’” (George Yancy, 2017, 52).

In this beginning section of the thesis, I aim to discuss how Linda Martín Alcoff's analysis of the racialized body is applied to culture. Since this work is concerned with discussing race, I will first define race as a form of play. I define play as any activity done by a culture that is invested with local concerns about what is at stake for that culture. This concern is typically highlighted in both intra and inter-cultural relations, and Section II goes into the cognitive nature of play and its connection to this understanding of stakes. This stake becomes more pronounced and extended as that culture continues to change and manage various relations, with Section II arguing that agency is forged through this managing and deepening of concern over what is at stake within culture. As such, these concepts of play and agency want to combine to discuss what culture is, and Section III aims to discuss in detail both a historical account of this very type of managing, the forging of agency a culture has done, and what type of play race is. To reach this, Section I must first theorize about race as a primary example of a play from culture. Drawing on the works of Alcoff and others, Section I aims to argue that race as play theory is an aspect of hegemonic culture, done to render all cultures intelligible.

In order to discuss play, I present the following normative theory of play that I am working under. Discussed in the writings of Dutch historian and writer Johan Huizinga, he argues that play is the “voluntary activity or occupation executed within fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and



accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life.'" (Huizinga 1955, 28). For Huizinga, play was a formative element in human culture and society at large, and play is so powerful that, if one follows Kant, it is through the play between pure and practical reason that the proper analysis of the beautiful occurs, and this 'judgment' is orientated with a particular aim and purpose. In of themselves, plays are largely descriptive at the start. They only provide epistemic grounding when a culture has endured and prolonged long enough to have an established history to notice a play. By looking back through this history into traditions and rituals, one can come to understand why a play, any one a culture has, reveals the purpose of a culture's narrative. Play theory details what gives a culture its life, because it is through a play, through playing, one understands what is at stake for their culture. Understanding what is at stake is the ground for a culture's narrative. It is the vital component that allows one to manage the various engagements, such as racial identity and engaging with those outside of one's racial identity, a culture can go through.

The idea of stakes is crucial here and for the rest of the thesis. Consider the connection between something being at play and something invested, in the etymology of play, "jeux", of "enjeux", in French. With "En" the prefix is "in" or "within." So, we get "within play"; something's being in play. But translating enjeux you get, in English, "a stake": the idea of something's being at stake. An example here might be generative; *Ce que l'on peut gagner ou perdre lors d'une action* = 'A share or interest in a business or a given situation.' In the example, one can see that the owners let the managers eventually earn a 'stake' in the business. The owners are the real players, but what of the managers? Do the owners have an interest or stake in the managers, cannot? The answer is yes, but there's more to it than that. Within play, there is more going on than any one play itself. Recall the heightened tension Huizinga says accompanies a play that is different from ordinary act/life. This heightened tension, this concern, doesn't map onto the owners the way it does the

non-owners, but at the very least, the non-owners access some aspect of the play itself, the motor-ability to exert something that allows it to be in relation with the owners. This is the “earning” part of earning a stake. When applied to race, the following point is now seen in full: race/ialization can be managed by an oppressed culture, their own plays a way of assessing the play of race brought onto them by hegemonic culture. For the entirety of Section I, I articulate race/acialization as a play from culture. The type of play race is, working out of Huizinga’s theory of play, will be discussed in the final Section III.

The conceptualizing of race/ialization I am working under comes out of *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, where philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff notes that despite the strongly essentialist and categorical nature race has held being slowly eroded away by contemporary society in our everyday social lives, it plays just as strong a role, if not stronger, in our day-to-day activities as ever before. This is because race still holds power over our collective imaginations, how we think and act in the world, and with a range of corresponding, epistemic effects. Yet race, in of itself, as we have come to understand, holds no weight, so despite our recent understandings of the significance of race, much of our sociopolitical imagining, as well as the apparatuses of power and domination we live under, still need/use race. Quoting Goldberg, Alcoff notes that “Race is irrelevant, but all is race.” (Goldberg 1993, 6). Race determines our job prospects, our economic situations, healthcare, relation to policy, and our interpersonal worlds. In short, despite its invalidity in terms of natural, essential, or philosophical fidelity, race still plays a crucial role in what we do, because it seeps through everything we do.

After discussing the impact race relations has on selfhood, Alcoff introduces, through the works of Omi and Winant, an account of race that is both macro and micro level. At the macro level, race includes a number of economic and political structures where it is managed, but it is the

micro-level that is of interest to us here. At the micro level, race consists of a variety of interpersonal engagements, interactions, and “microprocesses by which individual identities are formed (Alcoff 2006, 183). In our very engaging with different bodies, we create rules, systems, etiquettes, languages, codes, and other things that determine how we are presented, how we see others, and what modes or forms of conduct to employ. To this end, everything from handshakes to tone of voice, from gaits to greetings, all connect back to the first thing we note when we meet another, their skin color. For me, this acknowledgment is then put together with whatever culturally sedimented affects those bodies are raised in, and an aesthetic judgment is formed.

This theorizing of race and culture I present here builds on the work of Afro-Latina scholar Marta I. Cruz-Janzen, who discusses in her work “Latinegras: Desired Women-Undesirable Mothers, Daughters, Sisters, and Wives” how she navigates her own racializing from her native Puerto Rico. Utilizing the categorization of “Latinegras”, Cruz-Janzen describes how blackness, expressed through her hair, facial features, and skin, permeated throughout all the things she did in her life, and how her identity as a Latina was called into question despite sharing the same heritage with her lighter skinned and white counterparts in most engagements with family and colleagues, from childhood well into her adult life. “I was constantly reminded to pinch my nose each day so it would lose its roundness and be sharper like those of my brothers and sisters.” (Cruz-Janzen 2001, 284), she writes as she reflects on her past. When later moving to the U.S. Cruz-Jansen states that the same issue from her homeland presents itself but under a different iteration: being seen as purely black without any recognition of her heritage. “Fearful, I deliberately spoke with a Spanish accent even though schools kept placing me in speech courses” (Cruz-Janzen 2001, 285). She was also given advice and told to prepare for how to engage with anyone she met, “I learned to sew a fan gracefully, and wore my hair long and straight” (Cruz-Janzen 2001, 285). This ultimately failed for Cruz-Jansen, as her blackness wasn’t something she could really ameliorate or hide, and within

the Hispanic circles she tried to interact in, nothing changed, commenting once about how a group of white Latinas in an elevator switched their language to Spanish upon her entry, surprised when she asked them a question in the same language stating that she didn't look Latina. That "subtle, yet powerful, implication" (Cruz-Janzen 2001, 287) is at the heart of the racialized body Alcoff is trying to explain. In discussing Cruz-Jensen's experience, the key takeaway about race and play here is how it establishes why and how she manages her hair, body, and image. She provides the type of example of racializing/race that Alcoff theorizes and that I argue exemplifies a theory of play that race is founded upon.

Applying philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's schema of the habitual body, that the body's default position assumes certain things in experience that unifies its movements into a story when needing to present itself, Alcoff stresses that all bodies exert "postural attitudes and modes of perception" (Alcoff 2006, 184) in any and all interactions with other bodies of various racial and gender presenting backgrounds. Extending Merleau-Ponty's argument further, Alcoff notes that our interactions with these various demarcations in perception are representative of sedimented contextual knowledge. As such, because we process racial exchanges and identity, we eventually racialize, because race is already at play in the categorizing and sustaining at the micro level. It isn't what causes and then explains racism, but comes from within, referencing Hegel's view that our conflicts come from our parallel desires rather than our innate differences. This knowledge we are processing precedes all our engagements. In other words, like language, race is always already embodied with meaning. It's not to say, however, that the connections between meaning and language, race, and culture are arbitrary. These differences are real precisely because they're the ways in which the ideologies of race we have are ordered. The body itself is a dynamic example of this in Alcoff's analysis. Not only can it be 'seen' differently, but because of its materiality, it is a volatile nexus of different indexes and processes, each holding meaningfulness understood at the

level of lived experience. These are then categorized in a determinate way to be intelligible. So, for me, at a collective level, our framework of the culture operates in a similar fashion.

So far, these analyses have helped us articulate that race is a play due to the variety of situations one manages things such as perception and interpersonal encounters phenomenologically. The relatively idiosyncratic nature of these engagements so far is due to paralleling with race/ialization that is promoted in Alcoff and Cruz-Jensen's work. However, consider the point about Cruz-Jansen's managing of her body. How she managed her racialization is due to her having to engage with the culture around her. She notes specifically that her assessing of stakes changes once she moved to the US, where the managing shifts from not fitting within her culture properly to not having a culture to fit in at all. This shift in stakes, which will be discussed at length in Section II as the moving of items establishing the moving of meaning, highlights the key point I want to make, that race/ialization and the way it is managed is paralleling the way cultures manage the play race is founded upon. In a rapidly globalized and technologically rationalized world, we are exposed to many different attempts at "doing" culture, and of course, other cultures. Like race, then, we have come to realize that culture is not a reified, cognized, and universally applicable phenomenon that maps out a specific way to engage and live. Yet, we still act under a framework that culture is exactly that. This comes from the play of hegemonic culture, and the play of hegemonic culture is whiteness. Hegemonic culture uses its power to understand, arrange, and reveal a specified understanding of what culture is. In short, hegemonic culture makes the idea of "culture" intelligible to begin with, in order to account for all cultures. Race is a significant aspect of the way hegemonic culture does this, expressed in the various significant performances with corresponding judgments interpersonally that extend outwards to a larger world view. Alcoff's analysis of race provides a strong framework by which one can see how the white imaginary theorizes their interactions with the non-white, the white spectator seeing a black body

in a state of play or a hegemonic culture engaging with non-hegemonic culture. Since blackness is mediated throughout all our interactions, how bodies are racialized creates a normative effect. Race, therefore, still holds a haunting power because it is still a part of a universally applied yet cultural narrative. The question surrounding the nature of race, then, is also a question of culture.

It could be said that what I'm expressing here is a form of social ontology based in specified and politized social practices. Social ontology, here, refers to what are taken to be the fundamental existents in society (fundamental in the sense of being crucial to the workings of society, to social dynamics and social agency, etc.). They take on the known constructs of classes, gender, and race. I hesitate to understand this as something that's merely socially ontological however, since one could view these constructs in a deterministic or essentialist way. The key factor is that race has power over our collective imaginations, how we think and act in the world, and with what specific considerations for a culture. For example, blackness is understood different in the UK than here in the US, despite it being about the same race. The work of philosopher Sara Ahmed discusses the cognitive nature of this parsing of race culturally, arguing that whiteness works through a process of reification. Avoiding the question of an ontological given within whiteness, Ahmed begins instead with a strictly phenomenological account of how whiteness has been given overtime, which "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (Ahmed 2007, 150). Orientation in whiteness is the crucial starting point for Ahmed's analysis, reminding us of Husserl's description in the second volume of *Ideas*:

If we consider the characteristic way in which the Body presents itself and do the same for things, then we find the following situation: each Ego has its own domain of perceptual things and necessarily perceives the things in a certain orientation. The things appear and do so from this or that side, and in this mode of appearing is included irrevocably a relation to a here and its basic directions.  
(1989: 165–6)

Husserl's analysis is that when we start with orientation, we go from what privileged side of perception one is on to the point of what is 'here' for someone. From there, one can fill in the contents of what that 'here' is in the world and unfold, or gives direction to, it, creating differences. Ahmed gives the example of distance. That I am sitting here writing this thesis in my room is what "gives" this computer I am typing these words on and the CUNY Graduate Center in Manhattan their relative markers of 'near' and 'far'. In other words, that I am situated in a specific location phenomenologically engenders what is relative to me in experience as what is valuable about distance. To apply this to race, consider the example of the analogy of white and black to picture and frame. What is pictured is the black body, judged, perceived, etc. However, there will never be a picture of a white body, because it doesn't exist as picture, it can only exist as frame, a frame that is virtually undetectable, invisible. White is being 'here' as frame, the zero-point of orientation, giving validity to black being 'there' in the picture. From here, Ahmed goes into a discussion of unfolding and how it occurs. Unfolding starts with wherever the body is situated in, and from there, extends out onto all that it interacts with, in a *co-perceived* way, meaning in a way that is not just from the static points of cause and effect. That I am typing this thesis right now means that this laptop the paper is located within is 'for me' to 'do philosophy'. 'For me' means the machine is providing the background to what is present and directed before me right now, the thesis, and 'do philosophy' means all this provides a holistic account, what is received, of what is proximate to being a philosopher, from what I am in contact with, the laptop itself.

From here, we can see where Ahmed's analysis can be applied with a phenomenology of whiteness and body. Recall again the picture and frame analogy. The black body is the co-perceived picture that inhabits the world unfolded by the white frame that is then aligned, since bodies are "orientated when they are occupied in time and space" (Ahmed 2007, 152).

Incorporating Fanon's analysis of his body wanting to smoke as an occurrence of being ready to

action yet contingent upon sensation and perception, Ahmed points out that Fanon asks us to consider what is “under” the Husserlian analysis, namely, the “historic-racial” that forces the body to become racialized through a white gaze whereas it would simply be orientated towards what is already ‘there’ to ‘do’ normally if not for being racialized. That racialization occurs from the zero-point of orientation all bodies are forced to go through: whiteness. I believe Sara Ahmed demonstrates, when thinking of the black body being very present, that there is a corresponding understanding of the white one as *absent*. Unlike the black body, the white body doesn’t exist in a state of funambulism, because in a lot of ways, it doesn’t exist. White bodies dissipate in the background, while setting the standards for how all bodies are to be understood. Ahmed’s analysis can be summarized in one succinct point: whiteness need not consider its own itself in most interactions, despite the effects it has on all subsequent interactions, because it’s hidden. It’s stakes as hegemonic culture is always pointed outwards, and never within, since there is not a ‘within’ in the white imaginary. This point itself is not uncommon: contemporary scholars and everyday folks harp on this extensively, that white people always feel a considerable amount of pressure when their own whiteness is being focused upon, a feeling all too familiar to black folks and other people of color nearly constantly. Following Ahmed, the feeling stems from no longer being worldly; whiteness is put in the unfamiliar position of a critical lens now being applied onto itself.

This analysis by Ahmed is not without a history. Foucault demonstrated in Kant’s *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View* that the conditions for what is to be understood within experience are always tied back to a subject of some kind. However, the transcendental subject itself, as the starting point of knowledge, cannot exist within knowledge itself. Recall my analogy of the picture frame and whiteness, as well as the point earlier that it’s through the play between reason and imperative that the analysis of the beautiful is applied, and this “judgment” is naturally orientated with a particular aim and purpose as understood. I want to use this brief point



to argue that while whiteness in that interpersonal sense aims to hide in the way Ahmed describes, hegemonic culture isn't trying to hide itself, but rather uses the same process to hide other cultures as being anything like itself. Hegemonic culture, recall, makes culture itself intelligible. To do this, it cannot itself be an object of knowledge related to other cultures. Section III will get into this in detail, but the argument is twofold: 1) that other cultures are intelligible to us due to hegemonic culture, and 2) despite being aware of other cultures all over the world, we only call them culture relative to what "real" culture really is: hegemonic culture, which through various play like race, distances itself from what it makes intelligible.

## **Part II: A Definition for Reason and Rationalization**

"My body was indelibly marked with this stain of darkness. After all, he was the white mind, the mathematical mind, calculating my future by factoring in my Blackness." (George Yancy, 2017, 58).

So far, we've examined race/racialization as a play. Alcoff and Cruz-Jansen provided us a basis for how to approach this interpersonally, and I moved this analysis to the realm of culture, and how hegemonic culture establishes a play of race as of different approaches to rendering other cultures intelligible. Meanwhile, the culture of the racialized is established through ascertain then manage what's at stake in their racialization. While Part I dealt with how particular individuals handle the physical nature of these encounters, there's another aspect that relates to how the white imaginary understands what the mind is. I will use the works of Charles Mills in conjunction with other thinkers to discuss this aspect of play and race as cultural. This would make sense to explore given the final point of Part I, that in order to actually render what is intelligible, needs to be knowledge, and the type of mind to engage with this knowledge. Therefore, there needs to be an understanding of what the mind both is and what it is doing. This is the goal of Part II, which wants

to argue that to the degree it renders other cultures intelligible, through plays such as race, hegemonic culture also grounds rationalization and a theory of mind for itself. As with Part I, this will be explored interpersonally, then extended outwards to culture.

There is historical ground to the argument that hegemonic culture also develops through play a theory of mind. Consider, for example, the writings of Kant in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* where he states the following sentiment, based heavily on Hume's racist beliefs in 'Of National Characteristics' in his analysis of the Arab, Persian, Orient, and the "Savage" of North America that Cornel West outlines in *A Genealogy of Modern Racism*:

Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a negro has shown talents...although many of them have ever been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality....So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color.  
(2011: 58-59)

Following this, West shows that Kant explicitly referred to a black man as 'stupid' for no reason other than that his skin was quite dark, in a letter written to a friend. What is of serious note is that while Kant reinforced beliefs about intellect related to different peoples in a stereotypical manner, black intellect was regarded with a particular hostility and disrespect that he did not attribute to other peoples. I want to argue that this is because what's at stake for whiteness involves a definition of mind that must exclude any idea of a black mind as significant. Put more simply, hegemonic culture, in their rendering of other cultures as intelligible, must exclude blackness as its existence is the stake that it must manage. Blackness poses a grave risk in how hegemonic culture views itself as establishing the defining notion of reason itself. Blackness gets in the way of rationalization, so the play of race must be established.

Turning to Charles Mills provides the grounds for this argument. In his work “White Ignorance”, Mills explains that when any individual cognizer perceives something, there is a degree of socialization that factors heavily in what they end up perceiving. Mills argues that perception is part conception and a view of the natural world, usually understood in leftist literature and social epistemology as ideology when mixed with politics. Mills continues further arguing that, from a social-psychological perspective, the external relation our concepts have with ruling structures and groups reveals a tendency to, in the process of reckoning with any number of empirical data with our understanding, confirms any number of normative claims and constructed biases in the world. Applied to race and the idea of white normativity, Mills shows that it allows the white cognizer to parse out particularities in the world, specifically about race in terms of white supremacy’s claims of exceptionalism and superiority. This flows out of Mills’ concern, following the general themes from the extant social epistemology literature, with putting at the forefront the oppressive role in terms of race that society has on us. In the literature, ignorance is merely contrasted to knowledge, understood in habits like group interest, cognitive dissonance, ignoring the evidence, etc.

The conceptual framework around the term savage, for example, Mills shows emerges from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century social-darwinist views of the time. If a white person grows up to adopt this worldview, it follows that, in their cognizing of their environment, they will fail to consider the minds of non-white counterparts as equal intellectually to their own, as long as the line between said cognizer and their environment shapes their continuous conception of non-white minds as different to their own minds. These further differences are held with a degree of vestibularity. Consider the relationship between reason and emotion. Emotion is not part of the definition of reason, but it is needed to balance the many parts that constitutes humanity to justify a definition of human. Whiteness distills and places the various, interlocking concepts related to the prevalent

culture into a definition for the mind. This definition of the mind then positions whatever is outside the perceived as exterior. Exterior of what? Exterior of what is exemplified in the white imaginary as a definition for the mind. There is historical evidence for Mills' theorizing in action that, when provided with a theory of play, shows the concern highlighted in this Part II. In the 1936 Olympics at Berlin, Jesse Owens along with several black members of team USA dominated the event. Their accomplishments, however, were met with rebuke and ridicule, from both the Nazis and even members of their own home nation. This reaction to the performance of the African American athletes did not go unnoticed. Louis Lyons wrote, "The best the Nazis have been able to do with the racial problem created by Jesse Owens & Co. is to theorize that these represent a race of American helots." (Maraniss 2020). Publishing this piece in the *Boston Globe*, he continued, "they're more nearly akin to the panther and the jack rabbit than their Aryan competitors." Lyons' assertion that it was a racial problem created *by* the African American players that the Nazis had to theorize through is dead-on. Blackness is an issue, especially when in a state of play to the white performer, so in order to deal with this problem, the white imaginary has to handle this infiltration into their game by excluding the black performer entirely. For the Nazis, they didn't really lose, because against Owens and company, it simply didn't count. Considering the etymology and example of stakes earlier, one can see following application now in full: the owners (the Olympic committee, the Nazi German state, etc.) have an interest or stake in the aspect of whiteness that Olympics exemplifies. The false players (Owens and US team) are simply made exterior to manage this stake since they pose a risk due to their superiority in the Games.

Louis Lyons' made another important consideration when noting that Nazis were contributing the success of Owens to something essentially primal. Nazi analysis appealed only to black animalistic physicality as the reason Owens' team, despite their considerable achievements in the medical and legal fields. In short, the Nazis never considered the black mind, for precisely the same

reasons as articulated before. When it comes to black players, they can only have a derivative play, a thin notion of relation to any performance where the attributes they display are not engendered with intention and affect the same way as the white player. It is simply motor-ability and some semblance of skill that allows them to at least earn the ability to compete. They were allowed after all. However, the black player moves in particular ways that are not determined by stakes since they own none. For the Nazis, the judgment of particular actions, reactions, and technique within a play, coupled with the theorizing discussed in Part I, all implies a theory of mind that exemplifies whiteness, even in the realm of sports. The black players did not possess this, so the black players are not really players.

Sports has had a long history of exemplification of particular features to symbolically justify a variety of defining aspects of sport itself. To better understand the above, the following example might prove helpful. The famous logo of the NBA was crafted in 1969 by brand consultant Alan Siegel, who chose Los Angeles Lakers player Jerry West to symbolize the league. For years, West had a complicated history and relationship with the symbol, which the NBA worked to have never reveal was West. Eventually, West, along with others, wanted the NBA to change the logo to better represent the current vanguard of basketball players, black athletes. Many names, such as LeBron James and the breakaway dunk, or the famous Air Jordan inspired by Michael Jordan, were brought forward from the 2010s by fans and analysts alike to replace West, but the NBA remain unwilling to do so. Why? Because of the white imaginary.

There are two aspects to this small example of exemplification and the white imaginary as it relates to white and black bodies and minds. Jerry West is a white man, and the symbol of the NBA shows a particular play known as a pick. A pick is maneuver done by a player to an opposing defender to free up an ally that defender is guarding against. Pick and rolls are intellectual tactics in

basketball, which starkly oppose the physicality promoted by symbols such as the Air Jordan, which move the game of basketball from a game played on the court to a game played in the air. Sedimented by tradition and culture, the white Jerry West logo is seen by the NBA as the valued representation of the play of basketball, while the black Air Jordan symbolizes a representation of basketball opposed to the vision of the NBA. Mapping the analysis above of the white imaginary, it can be understood that the NBA sees black players and their physicality as exterior to what the definition of basketball ought to be vis-à-vis the logo for the NBA, despite black players building and maintaining the culture surrounding the game.

Janine Jones' theorizing of exemplification is that it's universally shared. In "Anti-Black Racism: The Greatest Art Show on Earth", she hypothesizes that because we share capacities to discern what's aesthetically appealing or not, these "capacities of taste" (Jones 2017, 391) are aesthetic judgments that come together to give form to whatever object we are perceiving, this form being validated in these capacities of taste. She applies this to the racialized subject by linking our perceptual capacity for responding to symbol and aesthetic object with the hierarchical and cultural structures that engender them. Understanding the dynamics around the black body's representation as analogous to dance performance, Jones succinctly applies the previous points addressed so far via Langer to everyday interactions by combining the symbolic nature of something within aesthetic representation with its physical attributes. In other words, the image of blackness, of a black body at play, produces an affective presence of blackness that is sustained and mediated by the physical attributes it might accompany, such as size and strength, and while normally the black body is not perceivable itself in the same way white bodies are, they're nonetheless rendered quite visible (recall the zero-point orientation and picture-frame analogy) via the "presentation of dynamic images" (Jones 2017, 394).

You can see this point of dynamic images in cinema studies scholar Samantha Sheppard's work *Sporting Blackness*. Sheppard argues that sports film in particular make specific statements about black bodies. She begins her analysis with a vast examination of black athletes in media throughout, such as Serena Williams, and how her reception in white circles and a white sport is structured. Described as virtuosic, Sheppard argues that Williams' body is strongly aestheticized as non-conforming to the white tennis body. As it were, this analysis of the black body is important in that blackness itself, following Williams' portrayal throughout the decades in media, is the forefront of black representation in sports, in other words, hyper-visible.

This is in sharp contrast to how the white imaginary engages with non-black other ethnicities, and how their cultures are understood. Depictions of Native American player Lyle Thompson, of the Onondaga Confederacy of the Six Nations, show the exact opposite intention, with publications like *InsideLacrosse* making moves to change how his heritage contributed to his hero status within his community. For example, when depicting Thompson, publications emphasized his hands while holding a lacrosse stick. Focusing on his uncanny ability to wield the stick with one hand under immense pressure, these images added blurbs that discuss how Thompson's talent on the field, even his unique handling of the lacrosse stick, came from the same work ethic and resources that others shared. This was despite Thompson's financially poor background, juxtaposed with the usual lacrosse magazine reader's financially strong background, and his connection with his heritage, belief, and people. Though pictures that emphasize Thompson's background exist, the vast majority of publications did everything to submerge that background. As more and more of these photos were consumed, Thompson's heroic status outside his community changed to an imaginative, creative, once-in-a-lifetime artist that the lacrosse fan could nonetheless become. Thompson's connection to the wider lacrosse world, initially as an *indigenous* player, became a showcase of an *ingenious* player. In order to become a proper face, Thompson's indigeneity, which

was first hyper-visible, was now significantly downplayed, so that the consumer of his photos can relate to him. This imagined relationship is the way in which Lyle Thompson's hero status is typically seen outside of his community. As a professional athlete, the focus on him is his play of lacrosse, but in a vacuum, without considering anything he finds important in that playing. This allows us to construct some type of connection with him without having to consider his viewpoint, or even setting him up as a model to follow under his terms. Instead, Thompson's hero status devolved into a simulacra of lacrosse.

This beginning Section I has outlined the following points. Race, in of itself, holds no weight, as Alcoff discusses. However, despite our recent understandings in the sociology and political literature of the insignificance of race *qua* race, much of our sociopolitical imagining, as well as the apparatuses of power and domination we live under, still need/use race. I argue this should also mean that there needs to be literature that argues for the significance of race as a type of play. Race as it pertains to social order is still very much made important as it determines our job prospects, our economic and financially determined situations, healthcare, relation to policy, and our interpersonal worlds.

As a result of culture and despite its invalidity in terms of natural, essential, or philosophical fidelity, race plays a crucial role in what we do and determines much of our social and institutional arrangements and our livability. By social-institutional arrangements, I mean the ways in which both a society's group dynamic and collective activities are shaped largely by history, tradition, and norms. Meanwhile, livability refers to the capability with reference to quality of living that motivates a society's drive for self-development. Livability is also a dialectical category and a random fact of attaining a certain level of comfortable living, though historical, as economic, social, and cultural necessity. This can be seen in how individuals often perform a combination of



financial, religious, and personal actions in tandem as well as in a specified order to better serve themselves. When talking about race, then, I believe Section I has successfully argued it is a play of dominant cultures that impose race as one way of navigating the world.

Play theory makes a significant case for giving life to a culture's livability. In terms of dominating, hegemonic cultures, play theory utilizes race to understand itself and create universalizing frameworks. What breathes life into these frameworks are the ways culture distills then defines what is perceived as a feature of reason, of the ability to rationalize itself. As discussed earlier, play is largely descriptive, only understood as meaningful and valuable by a community if it extends long enough that it can then trace back who and what they've been about through studying a play, such as rituals, sports, or art. As Alcoff goes on to discuss, explanations of racial experiences for the ways we are racialized tend to fall short due to fear that they be understood as being now prescriptive rather than descriptive. Often times, there are many who take the myriad of ways in which we experience and are experienced as racialized subjects as a way of providing explanatory power to race itself. I believe part of the reason is that we would very rarely attribute a play theory to race. I believe we must begin doing so, since seeing race/ialization as a theory of play shows that any explanatory power that comes from theorizing on race will lead to linking it with a play of race as an aspect to culture. Mills provides the basis for this argument by articulating the propensity in white cognizing to define and exemplify features of whiteness as being relevant to a definition of mind, reason, and culture itself.

## SECTION II: PLAY AND AGENCY: A COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

In this middle section of this thesis, I aim to discuss play in conjunction with Catherine Elgin's theory of exemplification. Brought up in Section I, I plan to focus on play's tie with exemplification for two reasons: 1) To apply it to the claims made in Section I that race is a play

from culture, and to understand race as play, we must see it as a creative and temporalizing act distinct from ordinary life that nonetheless sets the conditions of possibility for how whiteness cognizes the mind and body vis-à-vis the goal of hegemonic culture. 2) To give justification to the claims made in the Section I, that in much the same way Alcoff's analysis that race is a racializing that affords us values that we operate under despite being aware they hold no scientific/essential value, cultures operate under particular arrangements whose values are only locally significant, yet hegemonic culture render all values as universally significant as either to or for the standards for culture set by whiteness. By achieving these two claims, I hope to show how play is a useful framework to also speak on agency. Since plays are always tied to a culture, when combined with our social situations, play brings about the creative processes that house considerations and investments that are at stake when a culture engages intra or inter culturally, giving oppressed cultures the capacity to respond or "deal with" change by forging an agency.

In Section I, it was explained that race is a specified play that is drawn from the imaginative power of the culture racializing occurs in. Whiteness distills then constructs a notion of mind off of what is exterior to itself: blackness. This then becomes sedimented in contextual knowledge that is expressed in various ways of racialization for both white and non-white people. As a culture extends further, Section I discussed the different ramifications of the way racialization plays itself out in interpersonal settings. What's important to discuss is that these engagements are rooted so strongly in culture they appear as natural. This is similar to what feminist scholar Sharon Marcus refers to as scripts. For Marcus, scripts are linguistic processes that contain epistemic and sedimented cultural norms and values. Scripts around rape and sexual violence, Marcus writes, can be broken down via the aesthetic, the images and expressions of the women harmed and speech, that many rapists initiate conversation and engagement with their victims. For Marcus, they can also be structured like in a language. This last point is crucial in that rape scripts can be understood

as that which “shapes both the verbal and physical interactions of a woman and her would-be assailant.” (Marcus, 1992, 390). Following her definition of language as a social structure of meanings that enable a person to experience themselves as a speaking, acting, and embodied subject, Marcus explains that these various elements of the horrific act are so because they rest on a particular ground: that rape is a “scripted interaction” that is understood in terms of masculinity and takes place in a language.

It is here that Marcus defines her usage of scripts. She states that scripts surrounding rape are a metaphor. These metaphors convey several meanings that imply a narrative of the act, a series of steps and signals that can be recognized, and a final outcome that, when learned, can be changed. These responses vary from person to person and range from various ways of working with emotional engagement to autonomy and resistance. For example, a woman’s behavioral response to any violent act is wrapped up in what Elizabeth Iglesias’s 1996 article “Rape, Race, and Representation: the Power of Discourse, Discourses of Power, and the Reconstruction of Heterosexuality” describes as, invoking John Kavanaugh’s work *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, the Commodity Form. Commodity Form is defined as the way men and women alike act under societies arrangements that result in particular responses, drawn out from the identity society has imposed on us that we then express. The purpose is clear for Marcus. In an effort to combat what she views as postmodern influences that render acts of sexual violence against women as a brute fact of the world, script shows a relation between points that allows one’s acts to recognize and assess that context. This attunes one to historical, social, and political contexts of oppression, and leads us to understand others to a greater degree, as well as answer ethical questions. In other words, theorizing on scripts lead to revision and change. For Marcus, the language of the script allows women to set new conditions to remove sexual violence in general out of the arsenal of men, in the hopes for a better world.

As I understand it, Marcus' usage of scripts provides some insight into how I see the cognitive aspect of plays of culture. Script-language opposes the brute-fact approach to discourse surrounding men, women, identity, and sexual violence that Mary Hawkesworth, whom Marcus' responds to in her usage of scripts, and others propose whilst successfully dealing with the devastating critiques of postmodernist assertions about subjectivity and textuality surrounding the legal, socio-political, and epistemic avenues of sexual violence. Scripts can also be seen as engaging in a context such as sport as discussed in the NBA logo example of Section I. For example, having proper form when scoring isn't just about efficiency, but about showing mastery over that aspect of the sport, namely, the art of scoring. Grace, beauty, elegance, control, *femininity* itself, is emphasized as elements of something like women's figure skating or ballet, so much so that one could understand what being a woman is by landing a *pirouette* or following the male lead in salsa-dancing. Catherine Elgin explores this at length in her work on philosophy of dance as a response to Nelson Goodman. The idea is powerful, that a symbol exemplifies a property it shares with the thing it's representing by sampling that property to you in perception. Consider a dancing studio having a dip maneuver serving as its logo. For Elgin, it's not that the logo on the outside is the same as the dance maneuver being taught indoors, it's the way the symbol's is relating to you, the way the logo is being drawn and being put on a sign outdoors, that *samples* the dance. These set of things, being drawn, possibly colorfully, and being put on a sign high up, causes the sampling to be selective in nature as well.

We can see Elgin's theory work in relation to salsa-dancing if we consider the dance as a gendered play from culture rather than language doing the gendering to the play. The male dancer leads, and the female dancer follows. The male dancer sets the stage for the performance, and the female dancer responds adequately. The female dancer must invoke feeling, but does not plan

ahead, moving passively and reactively in order for the dance to be complete. Meanwhile, the male dancer must refrain from emotion yet be concerned with projecting each step of the dance into the future as much as structuring each step in the present. In these examples, you can already see the patterns of masculinity and femininity being reinforced into the act of dance, exemplified by different parts of the dance that others would recognize and relate to. However, while the dancers must abide by the rules set by the dance, circumstance provides the space for spontaneity and improv that may grow or expand the play. For example, when the woman decides to lead the dance due to a sudden change in routine that, when working in her favor, allows her to display her skill and move the dance down another path. As such, it can lead dancers into a space of agency that is not typically associated with the dance, following Marcus' point on scripts having the ability to reorient, to offer a more fulfilling term than revision. This is the type of agency that has room for reorientation and response to sudden moments that expand on each play, due to the imaginative cognizing discussed earlier.

It's here where I contrast with Marcus and Iglesias and the theory of script. As I read it, script is a powerful metaphor that situates meaning between people encountering each other. These are so because scripts are about content-laden movement understood in linguistic formulation and relationality, whereas play is about symbolic movement understood in cognitive representation and relationality. This is brought up by Marcus in her explanation of sexual violence from the man's side. It is not just that men are generally stronger and bigger than women, it is that, following her crucial point that any violent act is itself a language, men are following conventional structures of masculinity itself, and that's why these horrific acts occur, often with regularity in certain times and places. This acting out of masculinity does in fact still have to do with what she sees as the male imaginary. Marcus points out that it is a man's *belief* that they have the power to do these things that in fact gives them the license to act, but this is still strongly concerned with identity, or

better to say, a theory of identity that comes from an investment in the play of masculinity. Put more simply, what I am suggesting is that because play is an assessment and managing of risk, the cognizing within whiteness surrounding gender has been passed down to us for the sake of playing. This leads to the dispositions and attitudes towards acts of violence that Marcus is theorizing as script due to the fact that these become sedimented contextual knowledge, the rules for the game we must play.

This is why I differ slightly in my account of play. Unlike scripts, I believe play theory allows for more range to our responses to the interpersonal moments we are in. Play theory also has a more dynamic engagement with the many ways we do the managing and assessing of risks that Section I introduced us to. For example, in my theorizing of play, I argue that play has a tremendous amount to do with cultural objects and local ontologies. The religious historian Mircea Eliade posited that material artifacts are at the center of meaning in culture. Writing in the 1950s, Eliade noticed the growing secularism, the *profane*, of his native Romania and the world around him, but argued that people find themselves still attached to memories of the *sacred* via culturally meaningful objects he referred to as *hierophanies*. For Eliade, *hierophanies* are the crucial way in how religious symbolism grounds a culture. Second, play is profoundly *spiritual* in origin, even without conveying or expressing any organized, institutional belief, since it moves not through the psychological or linguistic, as scripts do, but through the dimension of spirit. As time goes on, plays transform and extend the beliefs of a place, people, and what they have into a narrative. However, this extending has no direction, it is is open-ended moving that may change over time.

This is a similar analysis of play discussed in *Truth & Method*, where philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer wrestles with this view in great detail. He states that all artmaking is a representational “play.” This play, which he calls aesthetic play, has one goal: to act as a *mimesis*, or a copying, of a

greater purpose for the artist. Criticizing the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who denounced *mimesis* as empty and amoral (along with the poets who did them), Gadamer argues that *mimesis* is not empty, but a transformative act that pushes the artmaker into new grounds (note the parallels with Huizinga on play and activity in everyday life in Section I). Combating western philosophy's traditional attitude towards art, Gadamer sets up philosophical hermeneutics as the method that provides the best framework for both understanding and finding objectivity that the Germanic Idealist, Enlightenment/Scientific, Scholastic, and Platonic traditions failed to fully apprehend. For Gadamer, that art is a representational play whose goal is to become what it is and to represent what allows it to become, all done in a transformative process into what is true elicited by the act. Artwork then, for Gadamer, reveals what is essential, and is contingent upon numerous unfulfilled possibilities. Each of these possibilities get awakened and revealed, brought into being, through play, and that play, for Gadamer, is the play of art. Notice, however, that in much the same way as *hierophanies* transform an object into the sacred without replacing the prior orientation of the object (a sacred stone is still a stone), artwork doesn't bring things into reality, it simply shows the truth of reality. Reality is already what is seen, but not transformed. As Gadamer explains, art is "the raising up of this reality to its truth" and that "By means of it everyone recognizes that that is how things are." (Gadamer 1975, 112).

Gadamer then goes on to flesh out and analyze the structure of aesthetic play. One part of this is the distinction between the artist and the artwork, or in our terms, the ritual and the one practicing the ritual. Recognition itself is recognized as being an intricate part in play. What the artist recognizes however isn't the descriptive process by which play is done, but the reality of play itself and how much one can recognize it. From there, an understanding of oneself in relation to play is had as well. It is also, in much the same way as *mimesis* is not mere copying but revealing of a possibility as reality, not simply confirmation of what is already known, but a revealing of

what-is-not-yet-but-then-made known. Despite the strong opposition to Plato's notion of mimesis, Gadamer's notion of recognition involving a revelation of truth through reality is similar to Plato's notion of knowledge as remembrance of the Forms. When we play, we once again go from what is immanent to what is transcendent, where we go from what is unknown in the world to a primordial Truth.

The art of play for Gadamer, then, is philosophy itself. From Plato, Gadamer's reading of Aristotle comes into play as well. When Aristotle sees poetry as more philosophical than historical, Gadamer says, what is meant is that we are not seeing essence as being in the Forms, but being brought down, still as essence, into the world. This is immensely important, as Aristotle unlike Plato, saw essences in the world. They're not up from the world, as the depiction of Plato Raphael's *The School of Athens* fresco shows when he points up, but are down in the world, as shown by Aristotle, when he points down. How they come down however is through being revealed through experience, and that experience is had, for Gadamer, through aesthetic play. It is this activity, this playing, which eventually reveals truth.

When combined with Gadamer's hermeneutical approach, I believe Elgin's theory of exemplification provides a fuller, more layered approach to understanding the cognitive nature of what the many states outside of ordinary life Huizinga articulated play to be concerned with. It also shows why Elgin's theorizing of exemplification is a vital contrast from the linguistic formation in Marcus' script approach when discussing how people engage in culture. This is because playing exemplifies something meaningful for the player in the environment they are in. They afford them, in a sense, something significant to assess and manage. Consider the following example. In a video uploaded by ONSCENE.TV's Youtube Channel titled *Car Thief Drinks Whole Bottle of Wine During Police Standoff*, a black woman who allegedly stole a car in Texas is confronted after being



reported for stealing merchandise at a pharmacy in San Diego. Officers state that she refused to surrender after being approached in a vehicle which matched the license plate of the car reported stolen, and instead insisted that she surrenders only after having a smoke and finishing her entire bottle of wine. In the video, the woman, who some identify as Victoria, can be seen calmly exiting the vehicle and finishing off an entire bottle of wine, as a small platoon of armed police officers and several cars aim rifles at her and wait. While *Spirit of the Game* showcases Lyle Thompson's link between play and culture via lacrosse in Section I, I believe Victoria's actions here demonstrate the link between play and exemplification, and why the exemplifying that Elgin theorizes has to do with assessing and managing risk. As one watches the video, the obvious questions are how is Victoria playing, why is this play an addressing of what is at stake, and what do these plays exemplify?

The first few answers are that Victoria is playing with her life, with the police, and with time. I mentioned that play is a temporalizing act, and this is exemplified in her statement that she will only surrender to police once she finished her bottle of wine. In a way, the bottle of wine acts as a fulcrum to the game, a game which is being initiated by Victoria, analogous to the *hierophany* of the lacrosse stick that I explained details and sustains the play of lacrosse for the Iroquois in Section I. The bottle of wine becomes the temporalizing object, that which begins the cognitive mapping and situating within Victoria's perception of what is going on in her standoff with police. The other important note is that the police are also playing. The game they are playing is tied to their role as police, but given context, this is tied to their role as the nation-state's arm of justified violence, particularly towards black people and black bodies. This leads to another consideration: experience and skill. These are exemplified in Victoria's handling of the standoff. She exemplifies supreme calmness, while the police exemplify patience. She exemplifies a type of boldness, yet acts slowly, knowing her life can easily be taken if she takes a step a mere fraction faster than what

is done. Recalling Alcoff's application of Merleau-Ponty's schema of the habitual body in Section I is generative here in highlighting that because Victoria plays with her body, and since the body's default position assumes certain things in experience that unifies its movements into a story when needing to present itself, Victoria's racialized body exerts racialized "postural attitudes and modes of perception" (Alcoff 2006, 184). The end of the game is already known, Victoria will be stopped, but in a way that she must address for her own reasons, possibly to live, possibly to not be injured, etc. In other words, Victoria's standoff is to avoid a type of end, one with injury and death, in order to obtain another, an arrest without harm. Victoria's posture exemplifies compliance to the police yet embodies a resistance for herself. Her apparent nonaggression allows her to put the police at ease as they play their game. She smokes, moves her bag, and walks around, all skills possibly needed in order to prolong the standoff in a way that's advantageous to her continued survival and success of the game. In the end, she is taken into custody without harm, and the tense standoff ends.

This standoff showcases to me the difference between Marcus' usage of scripts, which in my view, follows considerations and investments that are then made propositional through a culture's history as conditional response and approach, and play, a more dynamic and sedimented contextual structure that stays contextual and open-ended due to the various situations that allow difference to be exemplified. In much the same way objects grant an affordance to organisms so they know how adjust to changes in their environment, something is exemplified in a play that the player must address in order to find out what is meaningful and what is worth understanding in their situations vis-à-vis their culture. This contrasts with scripts, which I believe are too notational to allow for the types of improvised and real time movement within play, not because they *\*are\** notational and propositional, they come from imagination as well, but they fall into it via the temporalizing effect of hegemonic culture.

This notational style of symbolism is one avenue in aesthetics that certain thinkers, like Nelson Goodman, have argued is the adequate way in which one ought to understand art. In his 1976 work *Languages of Art*, he states that scores, categories, and notations do not care for subtlety or variety, but for form, for the ability to “specify the essential properties a performance must have” (Goodman, 1976, pg. 212). For Goodman, notation specifies the *essential* properties a performance *must* have. Elgin’s idea of exemplification was borne out of a response to Goodman, whereas explained earlier she theorizes that art is indeed symbolic, but not because of propositional structure and notation, but because symbols exemplify. This is my principle departure from script language, in that it is too closely aligned, in my reading, with a description of activity that seems symbolically notational, and not symbolically exemplificatory: our various scripts *become the essential* ways in which we respond in our cultures. Furthermore, this understanding of the exemplificatory cognitive power behind play allows for an understanding of agency. As I understand Marcus, an understanding of scripts being what they are should ultimately lead us to discuss identity in order to give a more robust account of agency, we ought to change our scripts in order to liberate us from our issues. For this theorizing of play, I believe one can bypass deep analysis of identity and instead focus on the production of subjectivities through play and the re-creation of plays through forming subjectivities, including inter-subjectivities. This multi-layered and dynamic approach gives way to a theory of agency that is forged out of assessing and managing of what is at stake in a culture. Furthermore, this theorizing of play in relation to resistance sheds light as to why certain rituals and activity have managed to continue despite many ages. No culture has remained unchanged by the issues of coloniality and colonization. However, certain cultures that have managed to survive instead of being destroyed completely due to the decisions made to deal with the temporalizing effects of hegemonic culture. A simple example: Hinduism, an ancient religion, has survived for well over 5,000 years, being practiced in various

schools and philosophies alongside the ancient Greek and Roman myths. There are still practicing Hindus today, the religion being the third largest followed belief behind Christianity and Islam. However, compare that to the religions of the ancient Greeks and Romans. If one were to argue that they believed in Zeus and Poseidon, Jupiter or Mercury, then one be hard-pressed to take their claim seriously.

There is much more to discuss beyond the scope of this thesis as to why Hinduism managed to survive as a legitimate belief, but the claims made here need not support or propose some notion of authenticity about the religion. Rather, it is through play of the religion overtime that it has opened itself to various ways of reorientation and extension across history, while other plays, like the ancient pre-European beliefs, have become dead plays since they cannot extend any further. There seems to be, then, a form of agency exemplified through these plays that allowed some cultures to persist in spite of hegemonic culture. However, this isn't to say that hegemonic culture's abstracting and universalizing of intelligible culture vs. non-intelligible culture need end in destruction. Often times, the alternative effect is cultural temporal displacement. By temporalizing, I refer to a uni-directional moving across time that is a characteristic of hegemonic culture. This uni-directional moving is often closely attributed to narratization, the imposing of a narrative onto real world effects and changes. Consider clothing, and how certain modern fabrics, layers, textures, and laces afford a contemporary and specific idea of just that, modern clothing for modern people. In certain countries, various people can be seen wearing their traditional clothing walking side by side and engaging hand in hand with people wearing these more contemporary styled clothes. What happens when one perceives both these people in a setting then? When you contrast the one in traditional clothing with the one wearing modern clothing, the former seems thrown into the past. They seem to be as if *they exist in the past yet are present*. You feel your present is your past due to the *hierophanies* and beliefs being juxtaposed to another view. Hegemonic culture's temporal

displacement then is an example of how exemplification works on their end, the result being whole people, material items, and ways of life exemplifying the following: the lack of progress, tradition, possibly primitiveness, or depending on the situation, intolerance, ignorance, etc.

Coupled with racialized and gendered bodies as discussed by Alcoff in Section I, you start to see then the issue at hand: the play of hegemonic culture is a rendering intelligible of dominated cultures because it symbolically exemplifies the features it associates with itself as interior to its definition of culture and the features exemplified as exterior the opposite of what culture is, in the same way the white cognizer renders black bodies/minds exterior to its definition of the mind and body, and as with the Nazis' reaction to Owens.

So, with agency, in much the same way one learns femininity through salsa or patience through a standoff, a culture's narrative, when dominated or facing a hegemonic force, is reorientated towards assessing and managing. There is not an agency in the political sense to reach, but a type of agency that *shows up* in response to and as a result of play. Victoria forges an agency, in opposition to her subjective identity, and while it could be said that her very subjective identity is a condition of possibility for her to make the specific play she does in the way that she does it, it doesn't take away from the fact that that condition of possibility can only be exemplified through her insistence of surrendering to the police only after she finished her bottle of wine. She wrote the rules of the game, the same way Hindus did in avoiding the destruction hegemonic culture has had on other religions and prior forms of life, clothing, music, language, or food. Therefore, one particularly important consideration for this theorizing of play is that it provides an idea of agency. In this theorizing of play, agency is more of a cosmological reorientating and extending, a result of assessment rather than a specified, political act that is universalizable amongst the oppressed.

Extension as I have been using it so far differs from temporalizing discussed a bit earlier in that it is

the moving across time that is characteristic of dominated cultures. Unlike temporalizing, extension does not assume a direction for dominated cultures nor a particular narratization. It merely moves in any direction given what is managed by an interaction with dominant cultures or even significant intracultural change and reevaluation of values. There is a narrative, but it's a narrative that is usually tied to an agency often associated with the real-life events of the group going through these changes. Agency in this light leads the group towards critical points of possibility by considering what is at stake for the group. This in turn results in a dynamic change or interpretation of whatever aspect of their culture that is needed to preserve their way of life in response to stronger powers.

Religion offers a helpful example of what I've described above, and the following which leads into Section III will detail this in full: how a culture assess and manages intracultural changes placed upon itself. In this example, I hope to showcase how a new operationalizing of beliefs is borne out of considerations and theorizing that parallels the moving and changing of a culture's *hierophanies* from what they previously exemplified to their new meaning within a different medium. Flowing out of historian Anna Akasoy's exegesis on the Buddha through an Islamic setting in the life and work of Rashīd al-Dīn, this brief historiography will offer a historical account of the play of a culture and how the moving of material items across time afford that culture ideas and narratives that extend it into the future. There's a long history of acquisition and exchange of items from across cultural arenas throughout the Enlightenment, Renaissance, and Age of Exploration. Whether via either trade, exchange, or conquest, each new owner of an artefact, in addition to the item, also obtained a *critical possibility*. By critical possibility, I mean a chance to recreate or further build their own idea of self or advancing their cultural narratives dramatically, for example, the emergence of the Renaissance study. A precursor to the cabinet of curiosities, or *Wunderkammern*, the creation, sustaining, and accumulating of the study, along with the ways in which items were strategically displayed and presented, allowed not just the space for the scholar

to delve into their work and research, but is, as Maria Ruvoldt discusses in “Sacred to Secular, east to west: the Renaissance study and strategies of display”, a transformation for the scholar of the study into a poetics of space. This poetics of space is a phenomenologically rich well of information and orientation that gives both cultural and interpersonal grounds for the scholar’s identity to shift from a religious nature to a more secular one, in order to theorize and conceptualize other words.

The moving and melding of different arenas producing different cultural perspectives occurs primarily through the moving, first, of items. From the Early Modern period through Renaissance, each new location or new space an item ends up in, via sequence, transfer, or trade, brought with it the possibility to diversify and redefine (or define) that arena, however large or small. Consider, for example, the moving of Middle Eastern rock crystals and textiles to storage units within church treasuries and marketplaces in Egypt across the Mediterranean from as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The moving of those items sets the stage for the paintings of Jacobo, Gentile, and Giovanni Bellini as discussed by Anna Contadini in her 2013 piece "Sharing a Taste? Material Culture and Intellectual Curiosity around the Mediterranean, from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Century." The most interesting version of critical possibilities material items/*hierophanies* can have when they are moved and viewed differently, however, are the writings on the Buddha that have appeared in Islamic literature historically.

Starting within the medieval time period, there are several references and accounts on the Buddha from Islamic texts, an example being the biography of Sufi Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, which is said to have provided an account for Buddhist reception in Islamic circles, as well as the *Bilawhar wa-Būdhāsaf* by Persian writer Nizām Tabrīzī. The focus here, however, is Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Life of the Buddha*. The consideration is due in part to the goal of the work. In her chapter titled " The

Buddha and the Straight Path. Rashīd al-Dīn's *Life of the Buddha: Islamic Perspectives*", historian Anna Akasoy states that Rashīd al-Dīn's concern as an author was as a neutral narrator who presents the *Life of the Buddha* as part of a history and as it was told by Buddhists, although presumably for a Muslim audience. Unlike prior Islamic scholars, Rashīd al-Dīn was more concerned with presenting a history of Buddhism and not a reading of it, aiming only to make Buddhism intelligible for a Muslim crowd. However, it provided another effect. In reading this, a practitioner of Islam would notice an affinity between the two beliefs, due to Rashīd al-Dīn's usage of Quarnic terminology to describe the Buddha. So, while he does not subsume Buddhism into Islam, Rashīd al-Dīn nevertheless gives his audience the ability to extend the conceptual and religious schema of Islam into a different direction via Buddhist thought. This direction could simply be a different interpretation of their faith or another avenue to approach how religion arranges their lives. The critical possibility here is that Buddhism provided the opportunity for a further significant understanding of concepts like evil, power, and prophecy by bringing them into a cultural point of orientation not unlike the poetics of space constructed by the Renaissance study for the scholar.

In having this account of the Buddha, Rashīd al-Dīn's *Life of the Buddha* gives a Muslim reader the ability to understand what it means to *understand* and *recognize* religion itself. This extends Islam's significance across time for the Muslim reader. If one recalls the definition of livability mentioned in Section I as that capability society has, with reference to quality of living, to self-development and a dialectic act that categorizes a number of acts that provide meaning in society, we can remember one of these varied activities are religious activity. The connection here is clear. In Rashīd al-Dīn's *Life of the Buddha*, a learned Muslim follower is provided the imaginative/creative space to assess and contemplate that aspect of their lives, religion, which in



turn affects the other aspects in a way that is like a dynamic change in a dance already structured and being done.

The history behind this type of extension of Islam goes back to the Mongols. For roughly 80 years, the Ilkhanid State of the Mongol Empire flipped from Buddhist to Muslim, a move one could anticipate given the intense variety of cultures the Mongols reigned over across Eurasia. As such, Ilkhanid art also has a perplexing mixture over time, where Ilkhanid royal manuscripts, predominately Islamic, were greatly influenced by aspects of Buddhist iconography. Buddhist motifs themselves had long appeared in the area, from the pre-Ilkhanid Turkish dynasties who had Buddhist converts as members. Even after the Mongols took over, because of how deeply entrenched their Buddhist background and teaching was, the later Muslim leaders never fully broke away from their Buddhist past, due to elements of Buddhist art permeating pre-Ilkhanid art. The most interesting note is that many of the Buddhist temples and monasteries that were constructed in present day Iran, even after the Mongols took over, were filled with Buddhist artifacts such as paintings, ritual objects, and sutras with illustrations. Discussed by Leo Jungeon Oh in his 2005 work “Islamicised Pseudo-Buddhist Iconography in Ilkhanid Royal Manuscripts”, these items stayed after the later Ilkhanid Mongols converted to Islam, and while many Buddhist images and buildings were destroyed, some were only replaced with Islamic art. Why the replacing instead of destroying outright, however? Oh remarks that because the Mongols had been accustomed to the religious imagery that’s primarily emphasized in Buddhism, they decided to commission images of Islamic art. For a religion that’s primarily book, and not image, centric, this is already a noteworthy extension. Indeed, the Ilkhanids, as Oh writes, commissioned luxury holy books after their conversion, stored and displayed along the many Buddhist transcripts and images in the courts. As such, the assembly of items in many different Buddhist temples that still stood after the Muslim conversion of the Mongol rulers, added in with the immense variety of culture in the area, on top of

the own rulers Buddhist past, paint a clear picture: a particularly strong example of a faith's features being at play, as the Ilkhanid Muslims were willing to infuse their prior religious orientation with their new faith in order to extend its meaning, for them.

According to historian Sheila Canby's "Depictions of Buddha Sakyamuni in the *Jami' al-Tavarikh* and the *Majma' al-Tavarikh*", the Ilkhanid courts were highly cosmopolitan, employing and taking in many traders, scientists, and merchants from abroad, including Marco Polo. Among them was, yes, Rashīd al-Dīn himself, who came to the courts in 1298. Appointed deputy to the vizier and court historian, Rashīd al-Dīn is tasked with compiling the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh*, a huge compilation of world history commissioned by the courts, Rashīd al-Dīn had planned for sections to be made every year. Following his death and raiding of his library, of the twenty-four original documents, only two fragments remain, one containing illustrations of the Buddha as Sakyamuni. Rashīd al-Dīn's source for the Buddha was a Kashmiri Buddhist priest named Kamalashri, whose account of the Sakayumni stem from western Mongol and Kashmiri variants of the Buddha story. Together with Kamalashri, it is revealed in the transcripts that Rashīd al-Dīn's *Life of the Buddha* was his endeavor to make Buddhism and the Buddha intelligible for a Muslim audience.

It is here where one can see why those Buddhist principles translated so well into the Islamic context. Recall the unique approach Rashīd al-Dīn took when writing *Life of the Buddha* as opposed to other accounts of Sakyamuni, in particular Akasoy's point of him being a neutral narrator. Rashīd al-Dīn wasn't intentionally translating the Buddha into Islam, he merely created the critical possibility to formulate a different and expanded understanding of Islam for a Muslim reader, because *Life of the Buddha itself was formed the same way*: the result of the strong and systematized Buddhist leadership of the pre-Ilkhanid State turned Islamic after the Mongol conversion of Khan. One can imagine the many pieces laying around in the courts warehouses and buildings, mixed with the Islamic iconography mentioned earlier that was commissioned by Khan

to replace to older Tibetan Buddhist objects that were possibly noticed by Rashīd al-Dīn and Kamalashri. Recall that those Islamic portraits themselves were also pieces created out of the same phenomenon, so the historical parallel of both profane and sacred moves as such to the Islamic conversion of the Mongol State, the formulation of Islam from Qur'anic veneration to visual art, and, mixed with Rashīd al-Dīn and Kamalashri, and then the *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* provide the rest of the analysis: The work was already intelligible because of the Buddhist past of the Mongols seen in their Islamic art. Put more simply, *Life of the Buddha's* effect on a Muslim's reinterpretation and extension of Islam is because *Life of the Buddha* itself was an extension of a prior Buddhist leaning nation's conversion to Islam and subsequent recording of their own new faith understood in the destroying but also moving of iconography depicting this change. Sheila Canby suggests that the Kamalashri and Rashīd al-Dīn's account of Buddha Sakyamuni was a construction borne out of the internationalism that existed in the Ilkhani Tabriz, or the type of syncretistic religious undercurrents in Iran at the time, coined an "Islamicised Pseudo/Neo-Buddhist Iconography" by Leo Jungeon Oh. Devoted to illustration rather than veneration, which subsequently influences *Life of the Buddha*, the material art pieces, themselves a product of play, become the catalyst for a play in which new critical possibilities can form down the line for a culture, the material items moving throughout a people's history setting the stage for theorizing also moving throughout that people's history. This also relates to the prior point that while hegemonic culture tries to universalize intelligibility, other cultures render themselves intelligible by highlighting the local changes made by the relation between items and thoughts.

The above was a slight historiography that detailed how a culture's play extend in time. This is because the play of Buddhism-Islam through art and through literature happens as cultures establish themselves, sometimes with the threat of hegemonic culture, or sometime with internal tension over power relations. Because it is always within a context or a situation, agency in this

scenario can't be theorized in its usual way because the narratives and considerations of that culture must first reorientate themselves towards survival in the face of domination or change. The play of lacrosse will be the case study that I theorize in Section III that shows the agency forged by the Iroquois in relation to one of their play, and how they have created patterns of resistance out of it. I hope to offer in this example a more fulfilling way culture should be understood in the final section of this thesis by discussing how the play of lacrosse by contemporary Iroquois indigenous players combat the hegemonic culture of the United States towards the Native Americans.

### SECTION III: WHAT IS AT STAKE WHEN CULTURE'S PLAY

In this final section of the thesis, I aim to discuss the relationship historically between certain Native American tribes and white settlers historically on Turtle Island, the name given to the United States prior to colonization by the indigenous peoples. I will begin with a detailed discussion of the end of Section II, exploring how the play of Buddhism-Islam iconography conjoined with *Life of the Buddha's* effect on Islam produces various important understandings related to the play. In Section I, I stated that race is a play from culture, but that the type of play that race is will be discussed in Section III. *Scheinen* is the play of hegemonic culture, and Section III will also discuss how the play of hegemonic culture, *scheinen*, leads to a version of what is called in the literature of Latin American philosophy as the self/not-self, as opposed to self/other, distinction. In discussing lacrosse, mirroring my discussion of *Life of the Buddha*, I will then discuss how it moved from its initial meaning as religious ritual to its current one as religious and cultural revival and extension of Iroquois/Haudenosaunee identity in the face of US culture's engagement with tribes historically.

In the first two sections, I've discussed how and why culture is expressed as a play. Plays are actions that differ from ordinary life that, through symbolic exemplification, contain a multitude of ways a culture is reorientated due to the assessing and managing of particular stakes. These stakes grow out of a concern that is derived from different encounters and engagements with other cultures. For hegemonic culture, this consists in the distilling and organizing of perceived aspects of oppressed groups that exemplify their inadequacy, thereby rendering them intelligible by this inability to measure up to the definitions hegemonic culture has created for itself as it universalizes. This play of hegemonic culture I will refer to as *scheinen*, and the end result of this type of play, this rendering intelligible by hegemonic culture, I see as an aspect of a self/not-self-relationship imposed by *scheinen*. My hope in all this is that by speaking about lacrosse before and after colonization, this thesis can offer two useful considerations: that through a phenomenology of play, in particular plays of cultures that forge an agency needed to persist in the face of domination, we can understand culture as a meaningful and important phenomenon related to humanistic needs that ought to be centered more stringently in extant literature surrounding normative epistemology and ethics. In the extant literature, culture is typically ascribed the *low idea* position, despite its importance and serious study in other fields. This is opposed to philosophy's preoccupation with what I refer to *high ideas*. I hope this analysis of how agency is forged through a play from culture offers a normative theory of play that I hope aids in the ongoing decolonial theorizing surrounding epistemology, ethics, and decolonization.

Throughout Section I & II, we can see why what is approved of as sport, as art, or as spirituality, with the narratives formed with the mixing of these, not only differ from one group to another historically, but that practices/plays are embedded within certain arrangements. The example of *Life of the Buddha's* effect on Islam was vital in that it had a three-fold effect: first, it showed why play is not like script, rather, it is a symbolic exemplification of different aspects of a

play, and the *hierophanies* or iconographies reorient and extend that aspect into a narrative. My use of extension that I defined earlier will be applied as follows: any act that locates, situates, and highlights a culture or idea within a play towards the future. In this way, I aim to articulate an application of philosopher Edward Said's use of worldliness. In his work *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said argued that the issue of Humanism is the issue of critique and reason, as well as location, source, culture, and particular experiences and identities. For Said, it's a sedimentation of human activity in knowledge, but one that doesn't dismiss epistemic value and status. There's still truth, but it's a making relationship to knowledge, not discovery and subsequent finality, or a collapsing into linear accounts. The making relationship still employs reason, but the reason that is shown here has to do with the grounded reality that people face, and how one deals with this reality, as well as their own being.

As I understand it, for Said, the issue of humanism then isn't just one of sedimentation and replication, as is in Marcus, but how that knowledge and how we acquire it relate back to our ontological status. While other thinkers, like Gadamer who will be looked at soon, work under a monotopic hermeneutic then, Said is working with a pluratopic hermeneutic. Within this pluratopic hermeneutic, there's a unified field of cultural expression based on a unified version of human experience, dynamic and changing, but unified in its focus. This is because for Said, there's multiple affective orientations to the world, which all frames and gives rise to specific horizons with specific access points. This is Said's idea of worldliness, one that has to do with interaction. He writes in the Preface, "Far more than they fight, cultures coexist and interact fruitfully with each other." (Said 2003, xvi). On his view, judging humanistic projects requires context, which he understands as the function of humanism in the first place, not as that which solves all our problems, but a useful framework that, out of his pluratopic hermeneutic, "understands humanistic practice as an integral aspect and functioning part of the world...not as nostalgic retrospection."

(Said 2003, 53). I am to understand play theory, and its cognitive nature as exemplification, as this making relationship to knowledge that is always situated in a pluratopic hermeneutic.

The second effect of the brief example of *Life of the Buddha's* impact on Islam is an understanding that the change in ideas paralleling the moving of materials historically show what a narrative truly is. Recall Huizinga's understanding that people at play are accompanied by feelings that are different from ordinary life. Those feelings are not inherently affective but are drawn out from their playing. These feelings are that group's worldliness, and as that worldliness extends through their rituals, their *hierophanies*, and their corresponding thoughts, this amount to what I would define as a narrative. A culture's narrative then is at first an engagement with the world around it, then the social-institutional arranging of the communities' worldliness, all imbued with a concern, into different acts. This is where I offer a different reading of Gadamer's analysis as well. As a monotopic hermeneutic contrasted to Said's more pluratopic hermeneutic, Gadamer's analysis is a dialectic that denies the importance of phenomenological engagement with the material. When the material is discussed in more normative analytic philosophy, it's only in relation to what is abstracted or decontextualized, usually for the sake of balancing the distinguished, various features of a thinker's system, like Goodman's position on variety and nuance in art. At worst, there is no engagement, and it is outright denied/made hostile in contrast within a thinker's grander schemata (think of whiteness making black minds/bodies exterior to itself here). Consider, Section I's analysis from Cornel West.

As I understand Gadamer's analysis, unlike the approach offered in this thesis, he is still chiefly concerned with the abstract in his explanation of aesthetic play as a transformative act. For him, it's a transformation of people by a changing of their ideas, so anything material is simply subsumed *into* the transformative elements of play, becoming a means to an end of a culture's playing, and not that which situates and brings about the transformative. Put more simply,

Gadamer, like Heidegger, makes the material vestibular to the ontological, employing a hierarchical approach with thoughts of one's being in the world maintaining the high position, *high ideas*, and the cultural/material that helps us parse, manage, and situate our being in the world maintaining the low position, or *low ideas*. This is done to structure a balance between defining and what is defined, and theorize on the nature of what's perceived and the nature of the perceiver. By and large, the literature in fields surrounding epistemology and ethics, and by extension language and cognitive science, renders culture as a low idea in favor of a higher order of theorizing needed to prescribe, connect links, and set stages for discussion surrounding various topics within the contemporary literature. Yet, these findings all have impacts and make considerations in how we view and approach others, and while much contemporary work does not completely ignore culture, it does ignore that culture has a normative effect on the type of theorizing done in these various fields, with more radical political philosophy usually needing to be employed to discuss just what scholars are invested in as they make claims in these fields.

Section II's example with Buddhism-Islamist iconography had a final effect: showing intra-cultural extension and play, expressed in the moving of items parallel the moving of thoughts and what each exemplify. Theoretically, if left on their own, while a culture may change over time, without threat or tension, the plays of a culture would most likely not shift, since that community or nation keeps on relatively undisturbed path. But as mentioned before, virtually all cultures have faced both internal and external relations, in particular, oppressed cultures. I believe then that analysis done here helps us delve into the very nature of how cultures operate within dominions of power and whiteness. Play shows how oppressed groups deal with how they're exemplified as being at the exterior of culture itself. For example, Christianity historically is a religion that positions itself as universal structurer that can easily absorb foreign or even hostile values and expressions into itself. This is due to its ability to position itself as the arbiter of knowledge and



values while concealing its own history. Meanwhile, most adherents to the faith also position themselves and their values as essential and universal ones. Christianity teaches its believers that their values aren't merely a reflection onto themselves, but onto the whole of the world, so that by design, there is simply *one* faith. Any other narrative transforms into a *schein*, conceptualized and schematized, taking, adjusting, fixing, and rending apart perceived inadequacies in foreign beliefs and values for it to be understood and changed for the purpose of salvation, giving life and purpose to their own culture at the expense of others.

Articulated by the Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *scheinen* are semblances or illusions, *Erscheinung* being a perceptible 'phenomena', how we perceive of an object in accordance with our forms of sensibility and understanding, in contrast to the *Ding an sich*, the super-sensible reality or the object as it is in itself. For Kant, an appearance implies something that appears and that is not itself an appearance. *Scheinen*, then, are objects represented under the necessary conditions that our cognition imposes onto it. On their own, *scheinen* are relatively harmless since no further change is made to an object in perception. If we perceive an apple and think of an orange, no harm is done to the orange. However, when produced by a hegemonic force's interaction with the oppressed, due to a mixing of ideas and the moving of items as explained earlier, *scheinen* shape and temporalize, giving an appearance, an acting upon, the oppressed in order for them to be comprehended.

If this sounds similar to what has been discussed so far, it's because it is. *Scheinen* are plays, the aesthetic plays of dominant cultures as they impose on others. They are the result of the displacing, transporting, distilling, amplifying, and abstracting of aspects in foreign cultures, symbolically exemplifying them as simply not cultures. As the play of hegemonic culture themselves, *scheinen* allow hegemonic culture to gain epistemic access into oppressed cultures. As

they engage with various cultures, hegemonic culture moves into the ontological and the social spheres of phenomenological experience and embedded cultural affects and *hierophanies* that a culture is based off, all to render it intelligible to itself. A result of this is a knowledge of what these cultures are about, and who these people actually are, but this knowledge is a crafted one primarily for the hegemonic force.

Recall the point made earlier about what Christianity teaches its adherents. The values they have instilled in themselves don't just connect to other Christians but onto other people around the world. Christianity is not just a faith, and doesn't situate itself as a faith, but as The Faith, the Only Faith, with its followers being the only light of truth, the locus of knowledge, and the arbiters of the good. If that's the case, then what is the appearance of other cultures conjured up by the *scheinen* of Christian nations? They're not just different faiths or other faiths. They're without faith. They're inherently lacking. In other words, *scheinen* have Christian nations exemplify other groups not as others, but as beings that lack. Those are not faiths, they are beliefs in nothing, and the people are not-selves, they do not possess the stakes Christianity invests in.

In order to better situate how I'm understanding the self/non-self, I shall turn to the writings of Argentinian-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel. At the start of Part III of *Ethics of Liberation: In The Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, Dussel argues with a historical framework of what he calls the critical-ethical reasoning apparatus. It's a reasoning schematic he discusses in the earlier parts of the book that when applied to actions and institutions, produces an idea or critique that is then reproduced. This reproduced idea that extends outwards historically is also an indexing of other ideas well, in that the reasoning begins to cover and make opaque that which is contra to it. What's vital here though is that for Dussel, what appears as a type of origin of oppression and domination is a "habitual" (Dussel 2013, 205) activity. This activity produces victims that become

targets of exclusion. This exclusion that is rendered by the ethical-critical thought process develops historically. In Europe, Dussel points to the ways Jewish people are excluded and Jewish thinkers, like Marx, have awoken to discuss it in terms of its contradictions within the systems they themselves came out of. This can be seen in the philosophical work of G.W.F. Hegel, where the Jewish people are not able to participate in his theory of *Geist*, or world spirit, that is central to his theory of history since they lack the features needed to break out of their local and focused epistemologies and norms and appeal to pure philosophy as a way to obtain Absolute Knowledge. Dussel then points to Latin America. Unlike in Europe, the ethical-critical processing that creates victims is borne out of violent suppressions and repressions from military coups and dictatorships sponsored by hegemonic culture as a way of pacifying and erasing hostile attitudes and knowledge bases and rendering the people victims. If I'm understanding Dussel properly, through symbolic exemplification, these acts split off into roles (like scripts) for the oppressor and the oppressed as ways of explaining each other's status from within the very cultures and traditions. In other words, just like the way Christianity encroaches on and subsumes even Arabic inscriptions onto its portraits or takes the ancient Greek *Logos* to account for Jesus' divinity, the critical-ethical thought process sets up an appearance that first subsumes, erases, then reimagines what a culture is about. Dussel is explaining the play of dominant cultures, *scheinen*, onto oppressed groups, starkly similar to the way white cognizing of mind and body excludes non-white bodies and minds yet defines them by virtue of their exteriority in Section I.

To follow Dussel's example, this critical-ethical thought process that gives rise, via activity, to the self/non-self-relationship shows up on Turtle Island. One example detailed is through historian John Greene's 'Early Scientific Interest in the American Indian', which presents an important piece on the interest settlers had on the natives they encountered in the new world. Greene uses a summation of the 300 year interest into one question: "Where did the Indian come from?" to

springboard into an account of the different engagements settlers had intellectually with the varied customs, languages, and tools that different tribes had. One example he details is linguist Benjamin Smith Barton's work, who believed that the origin to the native people's lie in a shared affinity amongst their languages. Greene points out that this theory of linguistic affinity for Barton and others gave them an imagined sense of a cultural and ontological ground to the varied and distanced tribes they came in contact with. This concern and labor put into answering what the Native American was would give the critical-ethical thought process its first legs, resulting in what native Osage scholar Robert Warrior in his work "The Finest Men We Have Ever Seen" Jefferson, the Osages, and the Mirror of Nativism' to be Jefferson's real task: the displacement of Native Americans via the epistemological and social categorizing of Jefferson and his Osage ancestors by the phrasing of the Osage as "fine men." According to Warrior, for Jefferson, the Osages exemplified what he imagined and cognized as the ideal noble savage that already reflected European values in a undiluted way, but if cultivated intellectually, can be made effectively white. Warrior shows this by use of other words like "savage" and "civilized" wielded by Jefferson as epistemological categories that, when brought into his grander narrative for the origin of the U.S., reveals the natives as primitive republicans that must evolve.

Historian Peter Onuf in his 1999 work "We Shall All Be Americans": Thomas Jefferson And The Indians." also provides a detailed account of how Jefferson's view of the Natives was racially adversarial yet also almost paternalistic, describing them as both "brothers" and "wretches" (Onuf, 1999, 112). These emotional and social engagements had geographical and political ramifications, as they would eventually give the U.S. license to seize land from them, as detailed in Jefferson's First and Second inaugural addresses as well as the Indian removal debates, detailed by scholar Sean Harvey in his article "Must Not Their Languages Be Savage and Barbarous Like Them?". In this work, he explains that the fixation on language from settlers onto Natives influenced many of

their interpretations of indian sovereignty, trades and negotiations, and issues of expansion. I believe these examples allow me to properly see the self/non-self relationship as one that is borne out of the play *scheinen*, what Dussel refers to as the critical-ethical, by European settlers onto different indigenous tribes in the future U.S. Historian Sarah Rivett describes one such project initiated by Thomas Jefferson in her book *Unscripted America: Indigenous Languages and the Origins of a Literary Nation*. Described as the Indian Vocabulary Project, she explains it was a proposition by Jefferson to Lewis and Clark to collect any native language they came across for Jefferson to retranscribe. Examples such as these as well as the reorientation of rituals such as Dehoñtjihgwa'és into the sport of Lacrosse by French settlers that rendered the Native American into a relic of the past are all examples of the self/non-self as being borne out of play elicited by a hegemonic and dominant culture onto another.

Section I claimed that race, in the way outlined most notably by Alcoff, is a play, and that culture holds universal influence since it determines what is exemplified in the perceiving of other people, as explained so far. Section II's first half was important for two reasons. One, it outlined why the nature of this perceiving is one of a symbolic exemplification rather than a linguistic formation of the different features one sees in culture. Marcus' usage of the idea of scripts was vital to contrast from because of the pluratopic hermeneutic as opposed to the monotopic hermeneutic that was brought up earlier with Said & Gadamer. For Said, and as explained earlier, the dominant self is also pluratopic, the product of multiple influences. So, there's a worldliness to its ontological status and knowledge base as well, in the same way as there is for the oppressed. It's simply obscured and ignored within the white imaginary as they craft and apprehend claims about the world from a position of authority and authenticity. But how can one make these claims? The answer lies in the other meaning of pluratopic, that of awareness. As I understand it, this awareness is of social kinds. We can see this in race. "Blackness" to me refers to the Caribbean since it's

where I was born and the type of house I was raised in, but I am aware of how it refers to the diaspora as well. However, I was only able to understand the diaspora and of “black” as being deeper than my local understanding of it by moving to another country, being raised in it, and meeting these people or seeing them on T.V. Pluratomic also means multiple points of view and access of judgments that one becomes aware of. Consequentially, a pluratomic causes one to be self-conscious, and more aware of themselves, due to the deepening of not just your knowledge base but your ontological status.

What does this have to do with the micro level of the self/non-self-relationship born out of *scheinen* imposed by cultures? It’s precisely connected to this issue of a pluratomic, of an awareness of social kinds that are not your own. Dussel’s analysis from before then is needed to show what happens when the macro-level critical-ethical thought process, or what I call *scheinen*, become replicated and then sedimented human knowledge and domination. This is the self/non-self-issue. One falls into the move to refer to the “non-self” the less likely they're exposed to environments and sites that force them to deepen both their knowledge base and their ontological status, due to the fact that the self/non-self-relationship is one that comes from cultures that try to be ecumenical and universalizable as they encroach on and expand into other territories and regions that are hostile and unfamiliar without needing to commit to understanding and engaging with these foreign spaces. Consider Snyder-Camp’s point earlier, that Jefferson didn’t even know or want to know the context of the words he tasked Lewis and Clark to document. What those words meant in community and were torn away and made to represent a transliteration of words that Jefferson knew and cared about. Jefferson did not deepen his ontological status, and its arguable he even deepened his knowledge base, because it would be hostile to his vision for the U.S., and the goals of the inevitable empire.

In fact, it's written about what happens when Jefferson was confronted with a deepening of both his knowledge base and ontological status. In 'The Archive, the Native American, and Jefferson's Convulsions', scholar Jonathan Elmer scores through the cognitive and epistemological contours of Jefferson's thought by going through his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Incorporating Freudian psychoanalysis and Lacanian/Derridean philosophy, Elmer argues that Jefferson's recollecting of an indigenous burial ground from his youth presents a sense of hostility or disturbance for Jefferson. Elmer believes he can show that Jefferson is in some way dealing with the trauma of this very foreign and intense space by wielding it as an analytic tool. This analytic tool has several functions, a historical one, an epistemological one, and an imaginative one, which situates for the person their place and how they understand the self between what Elmer calls the affective, what one feels, and the event, what one goes through. This wielding of trauma then begins an archiving of sorts, which sets new conditions of possibility by, to borrow Derrida's analysis of the word archive, being both the beginning of and the authority on something, at the same time. Consider the earlier points about how both Christian and/or hegemonic, dominant culture in general positions themselves as both the grounding of and the genesis of truth. Through Derrida's analysis, Elmer argues that Jefferson is putting into play "two orders of order" the "sequential" and the "jussive," "the *commencement* and the *commandment*" (Derrida, 1995, 9).

Combining this with *scheinen*'s temporalizing affects as well as Barton's concern with "linguistic affinity" of native languages, you can start to see the recurring claim made in each section: that dominant cultures make others vestibular and intelligible from plays that symbolically exemplify their different features as inadequate; setting different conditions of knowing and relating for hegemonic culture. These conditions of knowing and relating are weaponized for the sake of balancing and grounding dominant culture's own narratives, goals, and understanding of self. It is also vital for understanding micro-engagements of the self/non-self in terms of those

creative and subsequent haunting aspects of plays such as race as mentioned in Section I. This, too, is a historical phenomenon: In *Early American Nations as Imagined Communities* scholar Ed White develops a critical look at the relationship between the United States' social and cultural backdrop and its imagined origin as a community. White argues that, against the apparent lack of application on the U.S. of Benedict Anderson's seminal text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, we must consider what the imagined community of the United States is. White goes on to show that this imagined community cannot be separated from its racialized engagement and social othering of Native Americans. The important point is radically the following: that the imagined community of the United Statesian is that of Native American other.

This isn't just reflected in linguistic formulation, but as pointed out earlier, in *hierophany* and play as well. For example, in *Representing the Republic: Mapping the United States, 1600-1900*, scholar Rennie Short discusses why maps are epistemological tools of geographic representation. Using examples from the Lewis & Clark expedition's map-making of native lands, Short shows how maps engender a type of geographical representation that relate back to feelings of nationalism and place. Short traces these understandings of nationalism and place that maps represent back to proper social kinds, and those excluded from those categories. The purpose of these examples is to showcase that the self/non-self-relationship between the United States and Native Americans is composed of what the U.S. culture is and *ought to be* and what isn't and *ought not to be*, i.e., indigenous. To quote Short, 'Not only is it easy to lie with maps, it's essential.' (Short 2009, 9). This essentialism is the same type that is focused in the propositional structure of Goodman's symbolic art of notation discussed in Section II. The second effect of the first half of Section II contrasting with Marcus' usage of scripts with symbolic exemplification is that it grants a more robust sense of agency for people and cultures who operate within arenas of domination and whiteness. So far, I've



shown with various sources within the frameworks provided by Dussel and Said how historically, the self/non-self-relationship is one that is historically processed at the macro-level in culture via play.

I believe this understanding of the self/non-self-relationship as arising out of *scheinen* is the crucial diverging point I had with Marcus. This is because scripts and understanding our interactions as linguistic formation seem to imply the same narrative at both micro and macro levels due to their content, whereas here, I argue that *scheinen* are plays that produce false appearances about the nature and structure of another people that oppressors follow and the oppressed. I believe this gives enough leverage to the following claim: in order to have a more pluratopic awareness, one must start seeing the livability of other cultures, in particular the play they engage with that has them assess and address domination or change. I believe these plays can be the key to decolonial projects that aim to destabilize the effects of *scheinen*. An example of this appears in Said's account of humanism from before. According to Said, for colonized people to return to traditions, they need to be understood in the context of the anticolonial. The answer to dealing with Dussel's critical-ethical and the self/non-self-relationship lies within actions and feelings that come from improper readings of postmodernist thinkers that, for Said, made mistake of turning away from material reality and its limits. Instead, one must construct new plays or reconstruct past plays within the lens of decoloniality. Humanist projects, therefore, can combat the self/non-self-relationship if their framework is a decolonial one championed by the very people that are posited as non-selves in the face of a hegemonic order. An example of this can be seen in what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor details as "survivance" for tribal leaders, scholars in order to properly reflect on their indigeneity in today's world. (Vizenor, 1999, 5). This understanding came from Sarah Rivett's 'Unruly Empiricisms and Linguistic Sovereignty in Thomas Jefferson's Indian Vocabulary Project' where she argues that specific linguistic formations that indigenous informants

conveyed to Indian agents for Jefferson were done so as to mediate the effects of colonization.

Analyzing a number of words and phrases relating to religious texts, philology, philosophy, and the like, Rivett aims to show how the structure surrounding these languages, presented to us in this work with image sources, refused to be collapsed into linear accounts of American Indian origins or indexical relations among nations.

The discussion of pluratopic awareness is also crucial in that it distinguishes itself from matters of ignorance or non-ignorance. The play of *scheinen* is not ignorant play, a play that has gaps or suffers a lack or miscommunication about the nature of the play. Ignorance is an individual, or maybe even social, phenomenon. Cultures, however, cannot be “ignorant” of cultures they encounter, even at the level of taking another culture non-seriously. *Scheinen* are what they are precisely because they are the result of a crucial point of orientation from cultural contact, where hegemonic culture phenomenologically assesses various aspects exemplified to inform themselves of the world, for violent political gain for a group, or to situate various other plays that are also being temporalized continuously, in the encounter. A helpful example: Mircea Eliade, the thinker who coins the term *hierophanies*, discusses the sacred-profane dichotomy, and characterized many of the points used in this thesis about the nature of symbol and religion for cultures the world over would safely afford to someone the assumption he’s a culturally sensitive, progressive, and cosmopolitan thinker. Eliade himself, in his discussion of *hierophanies*, theorizes on objectivity, philosophizing it as that which is given to a culture’s people who are specifically orientated to receive, distill, and replicate it as sediments within and comprehended throughout the culture, referring to the people as the *Homo Religosus*. For Eliade, objectivity is found, not discovered, made, but not conceived. In the words of Eliade, “the manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world.” (Eliade, 1959, 21).

While this may seem similar to Said's humanism, it is known that Eliade, albeit in his youth, joined a popular fascist organization in his native Romania, and never repudiates his far right-wing views in his lifetime, though scholarship on his politics is still contested, with various sources from the 30s and 40s have him express his contempt for Hitler's Germany, Aryan race glorifying, and antisemitism. This means very little, as ultimately, Eliade's views, despite his work, stand as a critical example of *scheinen*. Despite going at length to discuss the importance and significance of why other cultures are cultures to begin with, Eliade's beliefs offer an example of why even phenomenological engagement with others can amount to simply research. Within the cultural anthropological and sociological work, various studies employ extractive methodologies to mine indigenous lands and peoples for their knowledge and beliefs in order to substantiate claims made in the literature, all while the hegemonic culture these works are situated in continues to dominate and destroy these cultures. Pluratomic awareness is crucial then in expressing why issues within the phenomenological method and engagement with the material established by hegemonic culture revealing what is truly at stake in those types of theorizing do not consider ignorance or miscommunication are foundational components to any play as theorized here.

The final parts of this thesis will focus on an example of this attempt: lacrosse, the religious ritual turned sport as played by a specific player: Lyle Thompson. A member of the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy, Lyle discusses the origins of the play in 'Spirit of the Game', a feature presentation by Native American photographer and producer Perri Yellow Bird (Crow Creek Nation) for ESPN's SportsCenter. He explains that *Dehoñtjihgwa'és* is a religious ritual that was provided by the Creator to the people. There are several purposes for the Creator's game, spiritual renewal and rejuvenation of the people, a purpose that gave it the common name the Medicine Game, preparation of wartime, conflict resolution against agitated tribes or families within a tribe, and a constant communion with the Creator through the ritual. The sticks themselves

are also of vital importance to the community. Explained by legendary craftsmen Alfie Jacques, each boy born is given a miniature lacrosse stick that they are then buried with when they pass on, to symbolize what spiritually and materially binds each child in life and death. Each of these reasons encompass the whole of the game, which had different rules and structures throughout much of the southeast and as far as the Great Plains before the arrival of European settlers. According to Seneca chieftain and leader of the Wolf Clan Oren Lyons, when lacrosse is spoken about, it is considered the “lifeblood” of the Six Nations, a game that is ingrained into their culture, systems, and life.

As one can see, what’s at stake with play prior to colonization is emphatically religious. The stick serves as a *hierophany* of the people, allowing them to partake in a game that exemplifies the will of the Creator passed down. The game is played *for* the Creator, the play of it transforming and sustaining, or to use my language, persisting, the people and their beliefs, bringing them healing and purpose, the reason behind the game’s other name: the Medicine Game.

In ‘The Medicine Game: Four Brothers, One Dream’, we are introduced to a project surrounding the Game that is used by the Thompsons not only to combat the racism they suffered through college but the ways they continue their play within the hegemonic space of professional sports. A four-part documentary, it discusses the relationships Lyle Thompson has with his three brothers and cousin, a relationship built off a shared tie to the sport they had since infancy that transformed and sustained them. In the documentary, Lyle discusses Thompson Lacrosse, the organization formed by him and his group to bring together their reservation as well as other peoples. Through a working relationship with his sponsors, Thompson was able to amass a team with his family as the head managers. The team runs lacrosse camps both in and outdoor to every reservation across Six Nations, averaging about 300 native youth per clinics that run several days.

The clinics are mainly about playing lacrosse, allowing members of his community to have a space for their children as well as have a focus outside of school.

However, the organization has another purpose. The Thompsons have organized lacrosse as a way for kids to reacquaint themselves with their ways, allowing teachers, healers, and other elders to spend time with the children so they can pass on the languages, customs, and laws not of just one community, the Onondaga, but of the Six Nations: the Oneida, Mohawk, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. The emergence of Thompson Lacrosse was a pivotal moment for Lyle Thompson in the cultivating and sustaining of his traditions and the play of lacrosse that has garnered him immense fame in the lacrosse world. A 2015 graduate of SUNY University of Albany, Lyle Thompson is the leading goal-scorer in the history of the NCAA at 400 points, a master player who, along with his brothers and cousin Ty, dazzled many people with their unusual dance like maneuvers and skillset on the field not normally seen in the sport. Thompson has acknowledged that his initial rise in fame began with a distinction between how the older fans to the youth saw and dealt with his indigeneity, which was explained in Section I. Thompson realized, however, that he could use the massive attention he had received in order to galvanize native children and people in the surrounding areas into being a part of a wider movement. Through the children, Thompson realized that his playing of lacrosse is not just a way to pass on his religious beliefs and emphasize his traditions, but it could be a *transformative* action that uplifts his community out of the issues they currently face as well, a task that he explains was his biggest concern.

Understanding the gravity of his change from lacrosse player to potential voice in his community, Thompson began to shift focus in how else he could potentially provide significant change. However, it was not just within Thompson's own community, but within the world outside it that he focused on. Thompson shifted gears in seeing how he can use his fame to stand up for

changes that need to be made, especially if they cannot be done by a group alone. This is detailed in “Lyle Thompson’s Evolution from Shy Star to Influential Voice”, which discusses one of those fights for change: Thompson’s engagement with the #NoDAPL Dakota Access Pipeline protests of 2019. An article by InsideLacrosse’s Matt Kinnear, he begins by noting Thompson’s fame had influence indeed, his name and renown having arrived at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he was allegedly expected, and warmly welcomed. He notes how Lyle introduces himself by his name, Deyhahsanonday (He Flies Over Us) and his clan and spirit animal, the Eagle. He engages in miniature medicine games, travels, makes signs, and protests, all uploaded and shared on social media, and writes on his experiences and what it meant for him to be a part of a political act. Kinnear’s focus was how the event changed Thompson’s usual quiet and more stoic mannerisms to a louder, stronger voice, demanding change, and committing acts of resistance to get them. It constructs the idea that Lyle’s activity has potentially moved him beyond just another lacrosse player. With his understanding of the situation, Kinnear argues that Thompson was evolving from a sports athlete to an influential, political voice. Lyle Thompson’s understanding of this transformative ability of lacrosse provides a useful example of how the artist can be influenced by their artmaking, a change Gadamer discusses as one of inevitable results for an artist as they attempt to transform the world around them significantly.

Speaking of Gadamer, consider one of the central points in *Truth & Method*, that *mimesis* is not empty but a transformative act that pushes the artmaker into new grounds, changing the artist and their work into something more. This something more Gadamer understands as the artist arriving to a deeply personal and sacred truth created by their aesthetic playing. Truth then comes from the artist’s ability to play, where the world could be understood and changed even more significantly in a variety of valuable ways and possibilities. Gadamer’s belief of play as a sacred act parallels Lyle’s transformation from player to activist as being related back to his community

via their play, lacrosse. Gadamer's work is significantly important because he provides us a useful model for understanding the voice that Lyle ends up becoming. Gadamer's analysis of art's both creative and transformative effects show up not just in Thompson's participation and emotional change in the #NoDAPL protests but extends out to other events as well, such as the 2015 FIL World Lacrosse Championships.

Captured by the slogan "Lacrosse Comes Home", the magnitude of the event helped propel his reservation into a newer period. The reason comes from the Federal International Lacrosse Organization pick of Onondaga Nation, New York as the host city for the 2015 edition of the indoor version of the event. This marked the first time an international sporting event was being held in indigenous lands in the United States. The decision to come to the reservations can be seen as coming off the backs of Lyle and Miles work both on and off the field. The FIL picking Onondaga not only brought a large focus of the game back to that community, which benefited massively from the revenue generated from the sales and promotions of the event, but they secured a \$6 million deal for a new stadium called the Onondaga Nation Fieldhouse. This came along with renovations to the Onondaga Nation Arena, in order to house the 13 teams that participated in the games. Through their efforts, Lyle, the Thompsons, and all of team Iroquois Nationals were able to bring millions of dollars to an entire federally recognized Native American tribe that historically struggles with high levels of poverty and disenfranchisement. All of this on top of providing a world's stage that centered and celebrated their play. Lacrosse had truly returned home.

Lyle Thompson's activity during the FIL World Games and the #NoDAPL protests is the exemplar that Gadamer discussed so long ago but also shows what happens when the stake of a play has changed. Thompson is seen within his community as sports athlete who navigates through issues of abuse and disenfranchisement to create change, coming to an area, bringing in his

sponsors, family, and members of his community to build, organize, and aid in creating and sustaining growth. This not dissimilar to the common refrain of sports analysts that his most significant ability on the field was his ability to elevates the level of play in his teammates. It is no surprise that ESPN's Anish Shroff summarized Lyle collegiate career by stating the following on an episode of ESPN SportsCenter in 2015, "He's been more than just the best player in college lacrosse. He's been more than just a generational player. Lyle Thompson has been transformative and transcendent."

The importance of play here, particularly religious ones, is in two fronts: before colonization, play exemplifies mystic connection with the sacred, and after colonization, exemplifies a persisting in the face of coloniality and power. As mentioned in Section II, in much the same way that organisms learn from affordances of their environment, a culture learns from what is exemplified in their play as they extend in history. As such, when approaching a theory of culture and play, if it forces us into the pluratopic approach Said envisioned, causing us to acknowledge other cultures and their persistence as central to their being. Knowing that the play of lacrosse is what helps found his community and his identity, Thompson becomes something akin to a mirror not unlike the lacrosse stick as *hierophany* for the Game or the bottle of wine as fulcrum for Victoria, that reflects his community. When discussing stereotypes towards them, Lyle's brother Miles explains the Game is important because it helps show that, "we're proud of our long hair, and we have it to show that, there's still Native Americans out here." (Thompson, 4:05–4:11).

I believe this thesis has successfully argued for the need to see culture as the application of play. The thesis argues that play is a framework needed to allow us to understand cultures as continuous and open-ended assessing and reorientating arrangements. These are done via a symbolic exemplification of aspects of a culture that act as the catalyst for understanding,



extension, or temporalizing, and universalizing. Victoria's standoff, *Life of the Buddha*, and the sport of lacrosse were the case studies of play in this thesis to explain the establishing of new conditions of possibility done through play that forge an agency for a culture. This thesis theorizes the play of dominated cultures as activity which exemplifies persisting and persistence in the face of dominant and hegemonic cultures, what I hope to further theorize of play as a normative and cognitive theory of agency and culture.

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