

IDENTITY ERASURE

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Preface

Before we can even begin to delve into the concept of identity erasure, we must first come to the base agreement that there is even an identity that can be erased, and if so, how this identity came about. So what is identity? Is it unique, innate, and is it even ours to begin with? Is this mysterious intangible thing we so eagerly call Identity REAL, or is it merely a fabrication of our imagination – created in an attempt to satisfy something within ourselves that craves validation and our place within/outside of this society.

My goal is for us to define Identity and the transformations it has undergone. Then we can perhaps determine whether or not this Identity has the capacity to be erased.

If indeed it can be erased, we will then try to determine if there is a possibility to somehow regain what it once was.

All this is to be explored within the following pages. My hope is that what I have found to be the most logical understanding of Identity and its place in this world will cause you to think. I do hope that you will find some truth in these words and our dialogue together; however, if you only take fragment of this discourse with you, let it be this... I want you to see the world in perhaps a more articulate way, and to approach the world and your way of thinking about yourself in relation to it differently.

~ The Activity of Identity ~

Identity is an activity of self-discovery and becoming, and it lives only in its operating through us. Each and every one of us has participated and engaged in it; it's natural and necessary for us to find who we are through the activity of identity. Every action we take and choice we make is a constant creation of who we are. We are the summation of our experiences, culture, religion, ethnicity, nationality... the list goes on and on. Each and every one of us is completely unique and there is no one in the universe that is exactly like us, and there never will be either. The reason for this is because each moment of our lives is irreplaceable.

I Am Me, And Yet Ever Changing...

Let me clarify this a bit more... Life has no rewind button; each moment that we live is incomparable to any other lived by us or anyone else. No one else not even ourselves could possibly experience this second, the last, or the next just as we do, did, or will. If you take into account the differences in life experiences, background, location, culture, and every other conceivable thing that effects who we are, you will see that there is no possible way that anyone could experience the world exactly like us... not even ourselves. For example, let's say that hypothetically I build a remote control that enables me to travel back in time, or rewind time if you will. Even if I rewind time back one second, I still could not experience any event the same way I previously did, because although I am the same person, my experiences have changed and I have changed. If each activity, thought, and event becomes a part of my identity or shapes it in some way, then, the very act of traveling back and time, the thought of doing so, or the occurrence of such an event would inevitably change or impact who I am and my identity as

such. So, there is no way that I could possibly experience that event in the same way as previous, because I am not the same individual, I have changed.

I am going to steal a concept from Heraclitus here and use his example: Heraclitus talks about a river that is ever-flowing. It is the same river however, it is constantly changing from moment to moment. Just as the river is the same river and it is continuously enduring through time, so we too endure through time – if even only for a blip in the vast expanse of history – and yet we too are constantly developing and changing from moment to moment. Even now, as you read these very words you are not the same person that you were before. Each word that you read is taken into you and has become a part of who you are and changed you forever.

Now do you see how there is no possible way that anyone could ever be just like you are at this exact moment? I don't think that people ever really take the time to think about just how unique they truly are.

Activity

As I suggested earlier, identity is an activity we constantly engage in; it happens every time we think, act, or don't act and is a constant reoccurring of self that is rebuilding and evolving every moment, and this is exactly what it is intended to be. We were meant to engage in this activity, and to recognize it as such: as AN ACTIVITY. It actually does move, or breathe; indeed, it lives only in its activity through us, and through our engagement in this activity. It is important to recognize it as such; anything else is an abomination to the very nature of our existence, for only when we recognize

identity in this way – as an activity – can we truly open up the space for its activity.

Through our recognition of identity – as an activity – we are consciously taking into account the very nature of the activity itself, meaning that our recognition of the nature of the activity becomes a part of us, and changes us by making us aware of what we are doing

and becoming. It is this awareness of self and self-activity that then opens up the space for identity. Aware self-activity is at the very heart of identity. So when we come to recognize identity as it was meant to be – as an activity – we then are able to truly engage in identity and for the first time recognize something important about who we are.

~ Identity the Stranger ~

The Monster

Present day society has oversimplified and yet complicated the very definition and purpose of identity and twisted it into something that it was never intended to be. In doing so, we have lost a great deal of our selves for the sake of this new “Identity”. Much like Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, we have created a whole new meaning for identity. Identity is no longer recognized as an activity of reoccurring and becoming, but rather we have constructed an entirely new creature out of social parts empty and devoid of meaning... and given it life.

We have named this monster Identity, and Identity is nothing like its counterpart identity. (I know this may all seem a bit confusing, but bear with me). Identity is a

living, breathing thing that we are seeking to find, as if it were simply present in the world waiting for us to discover it. It is that person that we hope to be. It is that ultimate us that we are striving for. It is the end result of a life’s pursuit. And we believe that once we find it, we will somehow be complete and fill some aching void yet inherent in our being. It is this monster that plagues our society; twisted, manipulated, and misunderstood, identity has now become Identity... and it is an abomination that must be destroyed for both its’ sake and ours.

Who Is Dr. Frankenstein?

Now when I say that society has Frankensteined identity, I do indeed mean that society has done so, however, I would like to now elaborate a bit more what I mean by that. I have come to find that all the while behind the scenes, silent surreptitious powers have motivated the mutation of this “Identity”. Just as Dr. Frankenstein gave life to his creature, so have these powers fed and influenced the creation of Identity. All for the sake of power, control, and even comfort, four key tools have been used in the creation of Identity: media, technology, government and religion.

MEDIA:

Today, we live in a consumer-driven society, where our men and women starve themselves and get plastic surgery so that they may fit some sort of cultural ideal. Both our men and women are buying into the cookie cutter Identities that they are continuously being exposed to. Every day, we are bombarded with words and images telling us what to think, how to act, what to wear, how to vote... I don’t think that many of us actually realize just how much of an effect the media has on us.

The monotonous ramblings of commercials and the deafening silence of images linger in our minds as constant reminders of how we should present ourselves in the world. It is this all-too-frequent mental

constipation that clogs our minds and in essence desensitizes us to our selves and brainwashes us into aligning with the media projected images and standards.

As human animals, we are naturally social creatures and therefore need social interactions. Hegel depicts this interaction between the self and the other beautifully in his Phenomenology of Spirit. In this text, he talks about self-consciousness in terms of self awareness. One can only become self-aware through the translation of self through the other. In other words, we can only be aware of our selves by seeing ourselves through another person: We present ourselves in the world. The other sees us and interprets us. The we see our selves in relation to the other, for without the other, we could not see ourselves in relation to any other conscious / sentient being and could therefore not be self aware. We need the other in order to understand ourselves in this world, for there is nothing else that is comparable to us, and it is through comparison that we may be aware of our selves.

However, in our society that comparison is misunderstood. Instead of understanding ourselves in relation to others, we attempt to become others, and in doing so, we lose ourselves. The media and all of its projected images tell us that in relation to the other – this actress, actor, singer, model or artist – we are unworthy of notice and pale in comparison. In short, we are too ugly, too fat, too bold, too shy, too conservative, or not conservative enough. What ever the case, we are not good enough and must therefore logically – at least in our minds – be strange outcasts in our own society, unable to participate in its intricate social hierarchy – or at least not at the level that the media tells us that we should. We are inevitably trapped within the media's grasp, or rather those behind the scenes of the media who are in charge of its projection and project it thusly in

order to further their power, domination, and control over the masses and see themselves as somehow superior to those that they subjugate.

TECHNOLOGY:

Technology has allowed us to become advanced in areas of science, electronic communication, and warfare, but it has also alienated us from ourselves. Through the use of technology, face to face human interaction has been exchanged and replaced with text messages, e-mailing, AOL instant messaging, and the occasional phone call. We rely so heavily on technology for our communication that we have all but eliminated the need for human interaction... but what we have forgotten is that human interaction is a basic need.

Donna Haraway describes this technological-scientific human relationship very clearly in her essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century". Haraway depicts technology and science as being interconnected and gives birth to the term technoscience – unhyphenated for that very reason. In her essay she talks about technoscience as already interpellating us in its discourse and labeling us as cyborgs. And in fact I think that she is right.

Every time you use a computer you are becoming involved in its discourse and using the device to enhance your self. Every day technoscience allows us to be in multiple places at once and do many other things that our simple organic bodies could never do on their own. In fact, technoscience is so much a part of our lives that it indeed is a part of us. We are cyborgs, influenced by technoscience everyday and in every way imaginable – from the food we eat to the language we speak it flows through us and influences every fiber of our being.

I see technoscience as having removed us from our selves. It strips us of our humanity and alienates us from genuine human contact, often times without us even realizing it. Technoscience has captured our humanity and replaced it with a cold metallic processor, by removing us from face to face contact unaided by technoscience.

GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION:

It should come as no surprise that I should mention government and religion as a tool of social shaping and monitoring, for Big Brother and or a deity is always watching. I mean, think about it, in terms of government: you have a driver's license or Identity card, a birth certificate, your fingerprints have been scanned into government computers, you have a social security number, credit cards, bank accounts, etc... All of these things are used to track and monitor you as a citizen, student, or what ever labels you are subjected too. Governing bodies are in place to maintain order and enhance productivity, however they have a tendency of manipulating, extorting, and controlling their citizens. For example: children are required to attend school until the age of 18; it's the law. In terms of religion there is always some sort of code of behavior that is instantiated into the society that will achieve, encourage, or otherwise affect their being. For example: Catholics, and Mormons have a code of ethics that they must adhere to in order to get to

heaven, or they risk being sent far from God. However, in both cases whether governmental or religious affiliation, both are means of control and methods of securing power.

Laws and commandments are put in place as a means of control and enforcing conformity. Now, of course any governing body will tell you that it is for your protection or for the sake of your immortal soul, however the enforcing of conformity, even if for the sake of my protection and/or soul, is detrimental to the activity of identity. For it is through conformity that we end up achieving the same thing as with the media... a closing and or narrowing of the space in which the activity of identity is possible.

Of course, not only do the government and religion seek to keep the peace, they also seek to reinforce their place in the society as lords – via the lord and the bondsman example. By subjugating the citizens and followers to their power, they serve to confirm themselves and their status in relation to the citizens and followers. So for the sake of control and power the government and religion establishes laws, commandments, and institutions that encourage and enforce conformity among the masses, therefore allowing us to voluntarily continue to close the space in which the activity of identity is possible, and securing Identity's place in our society.

~ The Erasing ~

The combinations of all four of these aspects of our life systematically reduce the space in which we are able to clearly participate and engage in the activity of identity. So as we willingly allow the power and ability to control our daily lives slowly shift over to the various lords in our world that serve to manipulate us into subjugation,

we loose our selves to their Identity. Identity slowly erases our capacities for identity and we are slowly but surely becoming lemmings and willing prisoners to our society, instead of engaging in the health translation of self. We are being erased, and all too soon what little is left of us and our ability to know that will be lost.

~ Light at the End ~

So how do we escape their tyranny? Do we act like Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*, and run away to the woods and try to cut ourselves off from society and the evil lords? To deny social interactions is to deny our nature! So how then do we deal with the problem of Identity? Well, by reading this you have taken the first steps. To be aware of our situation and circumstance I believe is indeed the first step in regaining our selves. We must be aware of how we are relating to the influences in our society and how they are relating towards us. Through this understanding we become more aware of where we stand and we begin to slowly open up the space for identity to re-emerge, for the narrow space in which the un-aware bondsman is entrapped is far too small to enable him to engage in any activity – he can only conform to the Identity that the lord has set out for him to take on.

Once you and I become aware of our current situation, it is up to each and every one of us to take on the task of truly engaging in the activity of identity and take off the old guises that Identity has told us to wear. It is up to each of us to consciously make the decisions that will guide and direct us into the becoming we wish to be engaged in. However, we must constantly remind ourselves that this is an ongoing becoming and there is no ultimate end result with which we should hope to be, but rather we should choose the ongoing process that we feel suits us best. So cast off the shackles that you so unknowingly and yet willingly put on. Now is a time for rejoicing for we have the ability to cast off the mental shackles tyranny. It will not be easy by any means, it will be an arduous, unending journey, but it is a practice worthy of your engaging.

Annotated Bibliography

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1950.

Bradbury introduces us to a society in which people fear their government. Much like the critically acclaimed movie “V for Vendetta”, Bradbury takes us to a science fiction world where the people are not allowed to think for themselves. Any material that is seen as unfit for the public is destroyed by the local firemen. In this society firemen do not put out fires, they start them. The government takes on the role of “Big Brother” and dictates what those in this society can and cannot do... and one thing that the people in this society cannot do, is think freely and remember the creative and emotional past of their culture.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Tr. A.V. Miller. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1977.

Hegel made a profound effect on Western Philosophy through the writing of this text. He introduces us to the idea of “the lord and the bondsman” where he talks about self-consciousness. Hegel discusses how it is possible to have self-awareness through the translation of self through another; one can only have self-awareness through the reflection of themselves through the other. In fact that even those in power, like the lord, still rely on those that they dominate (the bondsman). I think that Hegel’s profound example plays a major role in both personal identity, our social identity, and our identity in relation to society.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1969.

Huxley introduces us to a completely different science-fiction society in which individual identity is completely annihilated for the sake of the whole. The citizens of this strange “utopia” are genetically

engineered to fit into five different class types: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon. The first group are designed to be the leaders – they are the most intelligent and physically fit, while each of the subsequent groups are designed with lesser intelligence and physical prowess than the class before them. Each group serves a certain function in the society and is groomed to serve their communal obligations. All of the emotions that we supposedly hold dear have been successfully eradicated from this “brave new world”. All strong emotions have been eliminated, human relationships limited to emotionless encounters, and they are brainwashed in their sleep. Simply put, Huxley presents to us a world in which the people are formed to fulfill a purpose within the society and maintain the supreme power of the few; they are doomed to live an existence of constant stimulation, casualty, non-emotion, and consumerism.

Idiocracy. Written and Directed by Mike Judge. Performers Luke Wilson, Maya Rudolph, and Dax Shepard. 20th Century Fox. 2006.

Idiocracy is a science-fiction comedy. This film begins in the present day, where an Army librarian Joe Bauers and a prostitute named Rita are put into a hibernation pods and forgotten about for 500 years. After the “Great Garbage Avalanche of 2505” they awaken from their 500 year sleep to a new world of stupid people. Generally when you think of evolution, you expect the subject to evolve – you know, survival of the fittest... However, the exact opposite has happened to this society. While those of higher intelligence were responsible about procreation, those of lesser intelligence procreated at a staggering rate. By the time that Joe and Rita awaken from their hibernation, the unintelligent people of the world have outnumbered and overpopulated the world. The new society is completely stupefied: the big businesses have bought out the FDA, CDC, FCC, and even government. Everything has been degraded to hill-billie, white-trash, ghetto, imitation of our current society. It is a comical warning that shows us a perhaps extreme version of where our society is heading. “Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way!!!” We must lead, or at least follow, but we cannot be lazy and do nothing.

Into The Wild. Screenplay by Sean Penn. Dir. Sean Pen. Perf. Emilie Hirsch, Marcia Harden, William Hurt, Jena Malone, Catherine Keener, Vince Vaughn, Hal Holbrook, Kristen Stewart. Paramount Vantage, 2007.

This movie is based on the non-fiction book *Into The Wild*. It recounts the life of Christopher McCandless and his attempt at rejecting our consumer driven, constantly regulated life. McCandless cuts all ties with the established world; he cuts up his credit cards, driver’s license, social security card, and gets rid of nearly all of his money. He attempts to change the discourse of American living by responding to our consumerism in an unexpected way – he cuts all ties, lives off the land, and lives on the periphery that is somehow within the center of Western thought. He attempts to radically expose himself to what natural life has to offer. This attempt at experiencing life without domination, but rather as a free spirit traveling to the “beat of a different drum” was a success in that he shed light on the problem of society – that we are far too instantiated within technology, media, culture, and dominated by the government. We are formed so exactly and within the guidelines of what is socially acceptable that at times it feels inescapable. But McCandless proves that it is possible, and reveals to us some remarkably insightful perspectives that can only be shared from the radical, naked exposure to life.

Lasn, Kalle. *Culture Jam: How To Reverse America’s Suicidal Consumer Binge – And Why We Must.* New York. Harper, 2000

America, is not really “the land of the free, and the home of the brave”, but rather the home of commercialism and big brand names. Kalle Lasn discusses how institutions utilize their power, the way TV designs programs and structures the line-ups, ect... and reveals why we must change the way that information flows in our society. Lasn reveals the big brand name’s hidden agendas and analyzes

our fixation with brand names and icons. He seeks to de-market our society, which has fallen into the pitfalls of consumerism and resulted in a judgmental TV addicted generation of the culturally dead.

Maalouf, Amin. *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000.

Each of us are unique and what makes up our identity is likewise unique. No one in the world has the same identity as I do or you do, and it is because of this amazing intrinsic uniqueness that creativity and conflict arises. Because of our differences we can come together to do either great or terrible things. Some of the most amazing music, art, and literature ever written have been the meshing and molding created from differing identities. Likewise, wars have been started over simple cultural, racial, personal, gender related, and religious differences. History catalogues the great and terrible things that we have done to each other that have arisen out of deep passions heated and fueled by our differing identities. Maalouf takes us on a journey into ourselves and makes us reflect on the history of our world past and present.

Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

Marcuse lays out a roadmap for us, and teaches us just how this whole capitalistic system really effects our identity. He explains how we are all merely cogs in a machine that serve a function; we are only valued in that we are means to an end...the product. We are treated as a means to an end, rather than an end in its self – which is completely unacceptable according to Kantian Ethics. In this ceaseless cycle of production, we loose sight of what we want, we loose our alone time, we find no joy in our work, for we are being treated as machinery and not human beings. This process serves to alienate us from our work, because we are judged by our output and capacity to produce in an assembly like fashion; we work on a specific stage in the development of a product, rather than working on the product in every stage from start to finish – specialized station in the process and not master or craftsman that is skilled in all stages from start to finish. However, not only that, but we also alienate us from ourselves. Since we are being viewed as a cog in the machine, we begin to adopt that view of ourselves, because what we do is not a personal, artistic, or creative thing, but rather a mundane, monotonous repetition for the sake of the product – indeed there is no room for personal flare or individuality, it would be counterproductive to the machine. SO, we must remain the cog – it is this which inhibits personal growth and individual identity; they are sacrificed for the machine.

Olson, Eric T. *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

For hundreds of years philosophy has coalesced with psychology to create a philosophy of mind that had interpreted human identity via the mind and its inter-workings. Olson attempts to look at personal identity through the removal of psychology and examine the human animal without creating the philosophical problem that psychology often creates. When Descartes created the mind / body problem in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, it seemed as though there would be no possible way for philosophy to overcome it, so with the entrance of psychology, some philosophers thought we had found the end-all to this mind/body problem. For those who do not particularly accept the psychological approach, Olsen may be their end-all answer. Olsen presents us with a philosophy of personal identity that outstrips psychology and overcomes the mind/body problem.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1945.

Animal Farm is an allegory that depicts the dangers of totalitarianism. Similar to some of the other sources that I have utilized, a strong central government quickly begins to dictate all aspects of life. In this society, everyone is equal, pulls their own weight, and serves the collective...but even though

everyone is equal, “some are more equal than others”. In this novella, Orwell unfolds for us a depiction of how government, if it abuses its power, can take over the lives of individuals and stamp out their identity and re-label them. The government in Orwell’s story eliminates individual identity by convincing people that the preservation of the whole is more important than the individual...and that if we all work together, we can make life better for everyone. The governing body, somehow convinces its citizens that this is only a temporary project and that they can eventually not have to toil so intensely forever. However, they truly have no intention of easing the work for the citizens; they plan on milking them for everything that they are worth, and in doing so, they preserve the power of the few and the domination of the many. Individual thought and identity is dangerous to the regime and those in power...it cannot be tolerated.

Pearce, David. “Brave New World? A Defense Of Paradise - Engineering”. Brave New World. 1998. BLTC Research. 1 May 2008 <http://www.huxley.net/index.html>

In this critical analysis of Huxley’s Brave New World, Pearce discusses the impossibility of paradise-engineering, the use of drugs to subdue or improve society through instant gratification, amorality, false desires and happiness, tyranny and totalitarianism, the nature of man, stereotyping and classes, the nature of “utopias”, what went wrong, and consumerism. Pearce uses Huxley’s piece as a means of social analysis. Huxley is extremely insightful, and although BNW is not intended to be a prediction of the future, it is meant to be a reflection of the direction that society is heading and to some extent currently exemplifying. Pearce takes Huxley’s reflection and expounds on the parable-like story. Is this what we really want to be? A society of Instant gratification, that is incapable of producing anything of intrinsic intellectual value is a society void of humanity.

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves TO DEATH: A Public Discourse In The Age Of Show Business*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

I belong to a generation in which all your problems can be solved in thirty-minutes with a few commercial breaks. Television has regulated our lives in to manageable thirty-minute blocks, which in turn has created what I like to call, the fast-food mentality. We have handed sovereignty over our lives over to television, and we have begun to expect TV-like results out of life. Politics, religion, work, business, education, and media must bend to our perception of how things are supposed to work – we want everything quickly, instant gratification has become all too convenient and we are addicted to it. In fact, when we don’t get the instant satisfaction and gratification that we feel should be required of all things, we get irritated, frustrated, and/or confused... *I want my cheese burger! Its taking forever! This is unacceptable, I was waiting five minutes for my Whopper and fries!* With this instant gratification mode of life, we have successfully handed over our lives to the media, which governs our every waking moment; we have successfully handed over control to Big Brother and do not even realize it. However, just because this tyranny over our identity is not as obvious Dictators of the past, does not mean that it is any less dangerous, in fact, it may be even more dangerous. Big Brother has become a shiny bright TV screen with lots of adds and commercials; he has changed the bleak dictated discourse to that of mindless dribble and giggles – which has turned us into the culturally dead; drones doomed to walk in the shadow of a decadent, gaudy, dictator shrouded in smiles and products.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854.

Walden, or as it may be known in other versions, *Life in the Woods*, is one of the most insightful non-fiction books that I have come across in my studies. In this book, Thoreau isolates himself from society – although he is not completely alone, he moves himself closer to the periphery so that he may understand the center – in order to gain a clearer perspective of society. Thoreau moves out into the woods and is visited a few times by some slightly confused and curious friends of his. In his observations of society from the exterior, he offers information about the economy – which is the longest chapter in the book, and I think the one item of greatest importance to us. You see, Thoreau

calls for a return to the simpler things in life. He feels that our current economy – even more so today, since this was written in the mid 1800’s – has complicated our existence and our identities within that existence. Everything in life revolves around money, and we in turn go through the motions: we get a job in order to survive and live (comfortably), and we live in order to work. In this cycle, we often lose sight of the more important things in life, like our identity, relationships, nature, ect. The economy has turned us into robots and alienated us from the simple joys of life, that are often free from monetary burden. Simplify, simplify, simplify your life.

V For Vendetta. Screenplay by Wachowski Brothers. Dir. James McTeigue. Perf. Natalie Portman, Hugo Weaving, Stephen Rea, Stephen Fry, John Hurt. Warner Bros, 2006.

V For Vendetta is a fictional film in which a hero is created by an corrupt government. Our hero was tortured and experimented on by the military. The government in his society created a biochemical agent that killed tens of thousands around the world, and created a state of perpetual chaos. This unsteady climate was the perfect environment for fear, and it was through fear, that a new regime comes to power. This new government rules with an iron fist, controlling the media: newspapers, TV, movies, magazines, books, ect... Anything that is deemed unacceptable by the government is banned and added to the list of illegal material. Art, music, and theater are all directly controlled by the government – each piece must be reviewed and authorized by the government to ensure that it is acceptable material for distribution, so obviously everything that makes it to the public is censored and encourages positive feelings toward the government. Individual identity is irrelevant in this society. Everyone is just trying to get by with as little trouble as possible. As long as they shut up and do what they are told, and think what is deemed acceptable, they will be fine... but the second that they deviate from the cookie-cutter citizen, they are “black-bagged” and never heard of again. “Strength through Unity, Unity through Faith”.

Vonnegut Jr., Kurt. “Harrison Bergeron”. The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (1st release). 1961.

“Harrison Bergeron” is a short story about a dystopian society in which everyone is finally equal...forcibly. If you are beautiful, then they make you wear an ugly mask. If you are intelligent, then they medicate you in order to stupefy you. If you are an amazing dancer, then they place weights on you that cause imbalance. Everyone is made to be equal and monitored by the United States Handicapper General. In this story, our hero is a man of exceptional intelligence, strength, and good looks. Because of this, he is forced to endure the complication of multiple handicaps: glasses that give him headaches, alterations to his appearance, up to 300 pounds of weights strapped to his body, and headphones that play distracting, obnoxious noises periodically. However, in the end, our hero takes on a heroin – a beautiful and talented ballerina – together they strip away their handicaps and make a statement on TV. In the end they both die... but this tragic short story, is so powerful, that it has stayed with me since I read it about 6 years ago. This story always makes me grateful for my talents, and grateful that I can use them. I don’t think that we really realize just how much our talents shape our identity, and how different our self-perception would be if we were forced to conform to the extent that those in Harrison Bergeron’s society were.