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“What Makes Us Human”

Connection Piece

During my time at the University of North Carolina Asheville in the Master of Liberal Arts and Sciences Program, I have learned more about the human condition and what constructs various aspects of human relationships. While this topic is broad, it represents the learning and growth both educationally and personally that develops during one's time in this interdisciplinary program. I enrolled in three classes my first semester at UNCA. At the time, I was a recent graduate from Appalachian State University and received my degree in Secondary English Education. I yearned to attend a graduate program that would encourage me to explore disciplines, other than just English, to become a more well-rounded individual for my future career as an educator. I was ambitious and signed up for a sustainability course, a creative writing course, and an ethics course on technology. I was prepared to dive into this new world of diverse and adult learning. What I took away from that first semester was more than just stress and awe at the discussion and passion involved in the program. I took away new views on a world I thought I was familiar with and heard new voices that were challenging, thought-provoking, and admirable.

This program has influenced the way I view the world, how I understand human relationships and redefined the way I think and process information. The ethics class on emerging technologies I enrolled in my beginning semester, at first, made me extremely paranoid about using a computer. I read Wendell Wallach and discussed authors such as Pamela McCorduck and Glenn McGee. These were names I had never before heard of, but now make a lasting impression during discussions I have today. There is a famous Netflix series that was released that same semester titled *Black Mirror*. While watching with my roommate at the time, I was amazed to find that what I was watching on television was parallel to the discussions I was having in Ioan Muntean's class. The show made an impact in the community, as well as online

because I believe it represented a lot of concerns that people have with the way technology is growing and influencing in today's society. An overarching question presented in one of the episodes is how far society, or individual humans, will go to keep up appearances on social media. One episode portrays a woman walking through her daily life giving and receiving scores based off of normal human interactions, such as ordering coffee or paying a parking lot attendant. Over the course of the show, simple things like becoming frustrated for missing a flight, and asking reasonable questions, lowers her score making the people in her life look at her in a negative light. At the end of the episode, the main character's score becomes too low. She goes to jail and loses her ability to be ranked in society. This gave her the freedom to release pent-up frustrations at the system, vocalize her true feelings, and represent an accurate reflection of who we are as humans with natural emotions. There was an obvious reference to social media platforms today, such as likes on Instagram, or Facebook, or how many followers a person has on any given platform. In Wallach's book *A Dangerous Master*, we learned that a transhumanist, Martine, is in the process of mind uploading. Wallach describes this as, "...another scientific pathway that might lead to techno-immortality...the basic idea involves a person being able to reproduce her mind within a computer"(116). This episode touched on what Martine is currently experimenting with. The question I took away from the show, and into class, was how long would it take for social media platforms that already exist to reach this level of inhumanity?

My final paper for this course reflected my thoughts on AI singularity and addressed this question. After reading Wallach, I was able to back up my claims on the negative effect AI could have on the future of humanity with factual information. This translation from my education to my personal life was eerily palpable. While I have spent a lot of time on these social media platforms, and still do, I am reminded of the influence they have on human interaction and how

we perceive each other and our own relationships. This class brought to light many issues pertaining to the human condition and how social media has stunted our inability to form deep and meaningful relationships without stigma from online status. I am not denouncing the innovations technology has made, because there are plenty of positive effects, but this class allowed me to voice and question certain doubts I had and be able to discuss those thoughts honestly with other classmates. Being able to hear other challenging opinions and voices helped shape my understanding that true connections can still be made, and to be slightly less-wary of the tragedies demonstrated in the show *Black Mirror* coming to fruition.

The following year in the program, I enrolled in a seminar on globalization discussing utopian thought and other worlds. While the title of these two courses seemed to have nothing in common, I quickly learned that my way of thinking from the first semester would cross over into this category. Scott Branson started the course with a simple question- What is a utopia? I have found that many of the professors in this program tend to start a class with a general question, such as this, and by the time the semester finishes the question has transformed into thoughts or opinions on ideology and human perception. I had known what a utopia was defined as but did not know where this class would lead in my understanding of the subject. That semester was emotionally intense for me. I lost my brother to a battle with drugs and felt lost as to how things worked in the world. Because I was enrolled in the program, I took it upon myself to write his eulogy and speak in front of friends and family at his funeral. My intro stated, "A few weeks ago, my professor asked the class to write our own version of Utopia. A perfect world is hard to imagine, and more so write about, so I tried to focus on one aspect I thought would make our world a better place." I went on to talk about empathy. A trait that my brother had too much of,

but one that stood out to me as most important when creating a utopian society. I thought of my ethics course from the first semester and realized that if people were more empathetic to each other than maybe the world would not seem so cruel for certain individuals.

My final paper for the course was a short story I wrote portraying a world I thought came close to defining the question Scott framed for us at the start of the semester. I created a world with no color. A world where people had to understand each other on a deeper level because such a visual part of humanity's everyday lives had been erased. I created a society where technology was contained and used only for essential function, such as food supply and beneficial education. What I had learned from that first class subconsciously leaked into my vision of a perfect society. I saw where things could head if social media continues to influence how we live and wanted to generate a world without that concern. The humans in my story relied on the sense of smell to be able to connect with other humans. I transferred the feelings associated with specific colors into smells. For instance, I created a building that held actual plants, not just holographic, so that kids could visit and understand a part of history that had been changed. The museum-like structure helped parallel the world to our reality today, but also gave a chance for me to explain how humans in the society I created could still connect to the world around them. I talked about the emotions behind an older sister watching her younger sister sit still and take in the smells from a sunflower. The younger sister was notoriously rambunctious, but suddenly stopped and stood completely still to take in the smell of a yellow flower. The older sister watched in awe and was overcome with love, admiration, and patience for her sibling. The scene portrayed feelings the color yellow can allude to while demonstrating that the "smell" of yellow can still conjure the same sentiment of happiness and warmth.

Over the course of twenty pages, I built a community that worked hard to understand the emotions of other people. I focused on human connection- something that was talked about honestly and openly throughout that semester. Scott invited a local author Margaret Killjoy to come to speak to the class and discuss their book *A Country of Ghosts* on anarchy. Margaret is a transgender woman and self-proclaimed anarchist. Before that class, my impression of anarchy was what I heard from the news. I assumed anarchists were a bunch of rowdy humans trying to take down social order through violence. Scott encouraged our class to attend a two-hour seminar discussing anarchism where spokespeople answered the audience's questions point blank. My view on anarchy was completely changed. This group of people and term became humanized before my eyes. I started to understand the ideologies and changes this group of humans wanted to make and began to align with the overall concept of community and working together. If I had not taken this class, I may not have understood the goal of an entire community of people. Without this class, I would not have been given such insight to begin the healing process for the death of my brother. This class led me to believe that a utopia is constantly changing and can be re-defined by any human being. Many people reference heaven when discussing possible utopias. The utopia, or heaven, I imagine my brother in today stemmed from the discussions in this class, as well as this program, and is why I believe I learned more about human connection while simultaneously progressing my educational career in the Masters of Arts and Sciences program.

This past semester, I took a creative writing prose workshop. Tommy Hays has been one of my favorite instructors during my time in this program because of his honesty. In my undergraduate career, I enrolled in one creative writing class and chose this as my focused discipline in my graduate career simply because I enjoyed it. I always knew that I loved to write,

however, I had never written much in terms of creative short stories, prose, or poetry. I was accustomed to analyzing text and writing more structured arguments. Tommy challenged the way I wrote, and my views on the writing process overall, my first semester in the program. I wrote my first story over the course of a couple hours and was fairly proud of the work I produced. Tommy's comments on the paper were honest in steering me to the writing center and taking another look at critical writing concepts I was missing in my piece. I was already intimidated by the program, but Tommy's responses made me understand that if I was serious about writing I had a lot to learn and that I was here for that reason.

I take away many stories and new ways of thinking from Tommy's classes. That first semester, I walked away sure that I would never write another short story again. However, when it came time to sign up for classes the next semester, I found myself enrolling in another writing course. I grew to realize that what I enjoyed writing about was not necessarily what I was good at producing. Tommy's relaxed approach leaked into my thoughts on storytelling and over the course of time my writing began to feel less structured and began to flow more easily.

Last semester, we were required to write three short stories that were workshopped by Tommy and others in the class. It was the first time I was not sweating with nerves and I began to appreciate the different voices and various backgrounds of each of my classmates. When taking the writing workshop, I was reminded that there were writers, scientists, and even an ex-SBI reading my work and giving me feedback. I began to write short and suspenseful stories because it is what came naturally when I sat down to begin the process. At this point in my educational career, I knew that whatever class I enrolled in would be impacted by my previous courses. I knew that I would be shaped by my beliefs from the first ethics and technology class I took because most of the stories I wrote about did not involve technology. I also knew that my

ideas about utopias and the perfect world would show up without my planning, or knowledge, in certain stories because that information is forever stored in the back of my mind. Instead of trying to steer away from these similarities, I learned to lean into them. I learned to continue to challenge my perception of human interaction through writing. I also learned to focus on it to help create dynamic and realistic characters in my stories.

One of my stories in this class sprung up at two a.m. while I was fighting insomnia. The story was due the next day, and while I had finished a ten-page story about a completely different subject, I was inspired to jot down the storyline and come back to it in case I wanted it for another assignment. I drug myself out of bed and opened up my computer. "La Vie En Rose" immediately started playing because I had forgotten to shut off my Pandora tab. I opened Microsoft Word and lost myself in the music and this story that played through the keys on my keyboard. When I glanced at the clock, only an hour had passed and I had almost completed a fifteen-page short story. I closed my computer, went back to bed, and left it for when I woke at a natural hour.

The next morning, I opened my laptop and began reading what I assumed was a sleep deprived and delirious piece. Instead, the story I created involved a normal, yet panicked, reaction with another human being that evolved into a meaningful connection. I realized that what I wrote collided with everything I had come to understand regarding human relationships and emotions throughout this program into just a few pages. The story starts out with a woman falling asleep on her normal bus route. She wakes up to find that she has missed her stop and must walk the mile home in the cold and pitch black night. When she begins her stroll, she thinks of her day and her struggles, including how she feels overworked as an ER nurse and her affair with a head doctor. While she is reminiscing, she begins to see the outline of a man walking

toward her in the shadows of the streetlights. Her reaction is normal for most women given the circumstance. She begins to whistle, walk faster and crosses the street to give more space between her and whoever is nearing. She looks for places to hide but recognizes that her surroundings leave her prey to the figure now starting to emerge. It is a black homeless man who makes no move to get closer. Once he passes her, he asks if she has any spare change so he can call his daughter. The woman still feels the panic of a possible attack but decides to leave change for the man. When he steps into the light, she sees that he is elderly and endearing. All the fear leaves her body and the two begin an interaction that I could only assume would never take place in today's economy. The concept behind the story is to play on natural human fear but not to let that fear overcome genuine and kind connection. Without planning, I placed into context a lot of what this program has taught me. It is impossible to stop oneself from feeling innate human emotions- such as fear. Fear of technology, or fear of being without it, fear of a community you are unfamiliar with, and fear surrounding death. However, taking the time to understand, to empathize, to discuss with other human beings can help shape who we are and how we connect and form relationships with one another. This is one of the stories I am most proud of, and also my first short story to be published on an online blog. While this accomplishment may seem small, it is a positive step in where I want to end up. I want to write about the human condition and the way humans react in certain situations. I want to tap into natural human fear and explore various ways in which we can combat that emotion to achieve a better understanding of the world around us.

Starting this program, I expected to learn about disciplines such as English, Creative Writing, Sustainability, and more. I expected to be challenged and to have my writing grow and expound upon my ideas about specific texts and readings. I could never have imagined the way

my thought process would change and how I would discover a new voice. My worldview opened to groups I respected but never came close to understanding. Scott Branson had us read late authors, such as Ernest Hemingway, from queer and feminist perspectives. I came to understand LGBTQ issues on a more personal level, even though I did not align with any group in the title. Tommy Hays had us read young adult novels that explored ideas such as rape from the view of a rapist who was not aware of the severity of the crime he committed. I will never forget a classmate tearing up and saying how he had his teenage son read the book and how it led to a powerful conversation about the situation and the characters involved. I visited schools in the area and explored the idea of tactile learning through school gardens, and even helped make lemonade with a principal, because of a sustainability class encouraging us to find ways to make small changes in our community.

I learned to question certain perceptions I have about myself, my relationships, and the community I live in by listening to my peers and how their own life situations brought them to the University of North Carolina Asheville. This program gives a voice to the intricacies of the human condition and allows open and honest discussion about the truth of social issues. I had the chance to read stories about people's worst personal moments. About someone's miscarriage, about how it felt to grow up black in a white privileged society, and about a trek up Mount Kilimanjaro and losing a friend along the way. This program allowed me to question concepts about death and how human relationships change once touched by it. The Masters of Arts and Sciences Program awarded me advancement in my educational career but gave me more than just a Masters degree. It gave me the opportunity to dig into the world of human connection and explore what lies below the surface in all of our relationships and what makes each of us innate and intricate human beings.

Emma Dahlsten

“AI Singularity and Privacy”
Ethics and Emerging Technologies

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Ioan Muntean
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Section One: AI Singularity as a Loss of Humanity

There is much speculation into whether AI singularity will positively or negatively affect humanity. Wendell Wallach brings up many great points in his novel *A Dangerous Master* that

thoroughly explains technological singularity and its many implications. The singularity will represent a downfall and ultimate loss of humanity. The literal definition of technological singularity brings up this debate. The singularity can be defined as a hypothesis that the invention of artificial superintelligence will yield immense technological growth, and result in unfathomable changes to human civilization. Artificial intelligence has already woven and dug its way into the intricate fabric of the lives of almost every individual in modern society. The singularity is a hypothesis for now, but in a very short time period will become reality.

How do you measure a “loss” of humanity? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, humanity can be defined as “the quality or state of being human”(“Humanity”). When the technological singularity occurs, how will we define what a human is? With artificial intelligence beginning to become more life-like, there is speculation about what rights technology will have in the future. If technology were to have rights as humans do, can we define them as actual human beings? The ethics of artificial intelligence is broken down into two categories. The first category constitutes roboethics. This incorporates concerns with the moral behavior of humans as they use and treat artificially intelligent beings. The second deals with machine ethics.

Machine ethics involves concerns with the moral behavior of artificial moral agents or AMAs.

Robot rights are moral obligations of society toward its machines. Rights of robots can be viewed as similar to human or animal rights. Institute for the Future, a US-based think tank, and the U.K. Department of Trade and Industry have looked into issues of the right to life and liberty, freedom of expression, and law equality for robot rights. Experts debate about whether these laws need to be made sooner rather than later. Many philosophers have speculated when technological singularity will occur. Glenn McGee predicts that humanoid robots will appear by 2020. Ray Kurzweil has predicted for the year 2029.

If artificial intelligence is granted the same rights as human beings, and would, therefore, be defined as human, they would be apart of what makes up humanity. The definition of humanity as we understand it today would be completely transformed. AI has already begun to take over how humans work together, especially in the workforce. Joseph Weizenbaum argued that AI technology should not be used to replace humans in jobs that require emotion in the year 1976. Jobs included in this statement were customer service, soldiers, police officers, judges, caretakers, and therapists. Weizenbaum argued that people expect authentic feelings of empathy from people in these fields. When replaced with technology, we will become undervalued, irritated, and estranged with these technologies. Artificial intelligence poses a threat to human dignity when they decide to replace humans in the workforce. As humans, we lose the power of connection to individuals when they are replaced with technology. Tactile communication will become obsolete, as well as personal empathy and compassion for others in the workplace.

There are many opponents to Weizenbaum's theory. Pamela McCorduck, an author and philosopher, argues for women and minorities rights in these situations. She says she would rather take her chances with an impartial computer in circumstances where we would prefer to have an automated response without judgment. This is interesting to note with the injustice that has been occurring with police and the black community recently. It does cause one to think if these jobs had been handled by artificial intelligence, could the outcomes of certain situations ended with fewer deaths and outrage from communities? I would argue that McCorduck's theory would have to be the weaker argument. Being a part of the police workforce involves a certain amount of emotional involvement. If we were to place these jobs in the hands of artificial intelligence, humans would no longer feel a sense of connection to the technology. The police workforce deals with many things and some truly terrible situations. If an individual's loved one

passed away and the only thing to comfort that person were artificial intelligence there would be a lack of empathy and compassion.

Wendell Wallach talks about how humans are resilient species; however, we are fragile as well. There are limits to how fast humans can adapt and acclimate to change. Wallach says, “when demands exceed our capabilities, corners get cut, accidents occur, and the human mind and body breakdown”(60). Machine ethics can lead to unintended consequences. Self-improving AI can become so powerful humans may not be able to stop it from reaching its goal. Humanity will not be able to keep up with the pace that AI will take on in the future. The human value system is so intricate and complex that it will be nearly impossible to make AI’s motivation human-friendly. One scientist may have a simple idea in mind, while another has a completely different end goal. Humanity will be destroyed simply by not being able to keep up with the fast moving pace and relentless goal of Artificial Intelligence and the Singularity.

Section Two: Is Privacy and Big Data helping Social Justice?

Privacy and Big Data in the era of social media are highly debated issues as technology begins to pop up everywhere. The Oxford English Dictionary defines social justice as justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society (“Social Justice”). A certain privilege of society is privacy. Social media is a large platform that influences many individuals in society; whether these influences are used for worse or for better is up for deliberation. With social media and branding becoming more popular in modern society, certain privacy settings are being breached. Many companies can view what you look at

on your computer and use this information to individually cater to advertisements and pop-ups. Privacy and Big Data in the era of social media is harmful to social justice. People no longer have the option of whether they are being watched or tracked online, and many do not even know that it is happening. Online privacy has almost become obsolete in the modern era and there looks to be no hope for future generations.

Data surveillance is a popular form of privacy breaching. Data surveillance is a collection of information about an identifiable individual. You can obtain this information from multiple sources and assemble it into a portrait of the individual's activities. The most common form of surveillance deals with computers. The Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act is an act that states that all phone calls and Internet traffic are required to be available for unimpeded monitoring by Federal law enforcement agencies. This law passed in the year 1994. Billions of dollars per year are spent enforcing what this act entails. The degree that the federal government goes to in order to snoop through individual's personal lives is somewhat unfathomable. While this invasion of privacy is not new, big department companies have begun to use a similar process to up sale merchandise. This type of online viewing is not helpful for social justice. Every individual has a right to their own privacy, as enforced by the fourth amendment, and these breaches of privacy are going against the code of social justice.

When companies look into individuals social media accounts they are also prying themselves into people's social and private lives. It is widely known that in the job market today many companies will look at an applicant's social media account to see if he or she would be an upstanding candidate for the position. A component of social justice is equal opportunity. If someone were to post something more opinionated or thought-provoking than someone else, the company may choose to hire someone else based on personal discrimination. Christian Steglich,

from the University of Groningen and the Institute for Analytical Sociology, pointed out that inequalities emerge when analyzing social networks and segregating different variables. His research showed that social inequalities and discrimination of gender were prominent in some job hiring processes. If this invasion of privacy leads to individuals not being able to get jobs than privacy and big data does nothing for equal opportunity in social justice.

Surveillance cameras are another form of invasion of privacy. Humans no longer have the privilege to decide whether their actions are being watched or not. While there are some upsides to surveillance cameras, there are many downfalls as well. Surveillance cameras can be used to find shoplifters and kidnapers and therefore help certain individuals in society. However, they can also be used to interfere with someone's privacy as well as someone's well being. There are instances where surveillance rises above the average individual and deals with issues that are bigger than just a handful of people. When the military is concerned, we want to be able to thwart attacks against us. Using this breach of technology will allow our military to peak into certain individuals and groups that may be planning attacks to harm America. There are instances where surveillance and computer breaching would benefit individuals in society; however, there need to be tighter restrictions on what the government can screen as well as more information and advertisement to the individual on what they are looking at.

Omar Tene and Jules Polonetsky list the benefits of big data in an article titled "Privacy in the Age of Big Data: A Time for Big Decisions". A few of these benefits include developing the smart grid, which is designed to optimize energy use and to improve traffic control. While these do seem beneficial to society, they do not outweigh the injustice that big data can bring as well. Big data can bring in a certain bias of human behavior. Equal opportunity can be obliterated by information obtained from big data. There are a time and a place for certain invasions of privacy,

and one that needs to be better regulated. Eli Noam, director of the Columbia Institute of Tele-information, talks about the hardship in determining the type of privacy that we wanted to be protected, the extent we want it protected, and the freedom we are entitled to.

The issue of how to determine our privacy that is protected is a difficult one. However, in order to save the privilege of privacy associated with social justice, it is one that needs to be figured out and soon before it is too late.

Section Three: Extrinsic Objections of the Singularity and Privacy

Extrinsic objections mainly revolve around the environment, health, and safety.

Environmental and human health impacts are also taken into account. Emerging technologies such as AI singularity and Privacy can violate certain constitutional rights from these impacts; mainly focusing on if the technology were to displace or kill people. This may sound a bit extreme, but it is not far off from what has been portrayed in the media today. Many individuals are infatuated with movies and books containing certain technologies similar to what is capable of artificial intelligence and surveillance. In an effort to not sound too pessimistic about the technology, I am not arguing that these technologies will rise to kill off the human race. I am going to discuss the implications of unfriendly artificial intelligence and the affect surveillance has on the safety of individuals.

Safety is a big extrinsic concern for both of these technologies. Artificial intelligence is not something that makes most people initially feel comfortable with. If what philosophers say to believe is true, then humans have little choice in what happens with technology and the consequences of the technology. In fact, humans have little choice in what happens with these technologies today. Many people do not understand the breach of security

that is already happening through privacy and data online, as well as with surveillance cameras. Individuals are not informed of the many implications that can happen after society reaches technological singularity. The literal safety of our lives could be placed in the hands of technology if super-intelligence reaches a point in time where they would take on jobs in the military and police force. Data surveillance can alter an innocent person's life and well being too. If data surveillance were to fall into the wrong hands, the safety of that individual would be at stake. Imagine if a large database were to be leaked. Thousands of medical records and background knowledge could be dropped in the hands of an untrustworthy person and many people would not have the power to do anything about that.

To view a different side of the argument, I wanted to revisit Pamela McCorduck's argument about how we may want certain positions supervised by technology so there will be no bias in the workforce. With everything that has been occurring with the police workforce in modern time, I would not argue with this statement. However, it is so hard to calculate the risks that might occur. What if there was a bug in the super intelligence and it exploded into something much greater than we are prepared for? It is true that artificial intelligence could be used for un-bias in the workforce. Is it worth the unprecedented risks that might occur if or when this may happen?

Privacy and big data have their own benefits as well. Like most technologies, there are two sides to the argument of whether they will be beneficial or detrimental to society. As previously stated, there are many uses of data surveillance for issues that are bigger than just a few individuals. Where military and the safety of America are concerned, there should be special tracking for terrorist activity. However, it is the prying of large companies into individual accounts that seems too far. Why should corporations be able to advertise their merchandise

based off of what I am searching for on the computer? There is enough coercion in social media. Taking that coercion to personal accounts is crossing the line. There needs to be more information on what is being watched and why certain businesses are looking into everyone's personal information. There is never a button I can push that allows me the option to have my search engine explored. If businesses were more open with their customers, there may be better ways to tailor advertisements to these specific individuals.

Jeremy Bentham made a significant reference to surveillance ethics in the year 1995. Surveillance ethics considers the moral aspects of how surveillance is employed. Bentham created the idea of the Panopticon. The Panopticon was to be a circular prison with the cells adjacent to the outside walls. There was a tower in the center where the prison supervisor would live and watch the inmates without the inmates being able to watch him. Bentham suggested that this would deter inmates from acting out and help behavioral problems because they knew they could be watched at any given moment of the day. George Orwell extended the Panopticon in his book 1984. Orwell extended the Panopticon to encompass the whole of society. The Panopticon became electrical with a two-way television, which allowed the state almost total auditory and visual access to the homes, streets, and workplaces. Orwell explores the implications of this in his novel and demonstrates the states need for power and how cruel the surveillance was to the citizens. Orwell demonstrates the pessimistic side of surveillance and invasions of privacy in his novel. By showing the tyranny epitomized by big brother in his book, Orwell reveals what could easily happen with this technology in the future.

Being an optimist and pessimist in reference to technologies should vary according to the technology and its cost-benefit analysis. I do not mind having government interfere with my personal information if it means stopping terrorist motives and protecting civilian lives.

However, searching through an individual's browser history seems to encroach on the fourth amendment and something that should be announced instead of hidden through online encrypts. Another extrinsic objection is having these two technologies imposed on individuals without their consent. There are many ways that this could happen. One may be through the power of authority and the other can derive from social pressure. This imposes a violation against human rights. Humans have the right to authenticity, autonomy, and identity. The singularity will bring technology into the lives of almost every individual. There will no longer be a way to separate one's self from technology. According to a Kaiser Foundation study, children between the ages of eight and eighteen spend an average of seven hours and 38 minutes a day with digital media, around the same average amount of hours one needs for a full night's rest. Technology has already become synonymous with human lives; it has almost become our identity. Social media accounts become similar and what is popular in social media is what becomes the norm. When the singularity occurs, humans will lose what is left of our autonomy as well as our identity. Surveillance and privacy impede on these issues as well. In Ron Sandler's book *Ethics and Emerging Technologies* he discusses the future of data surveillance. It was noted that "...it will be impossible to have any contact with the outside world that is not watched and recorded"(Stanley 272). The majority of individuals, myself included, would not want every aspect of their life being recorded or watched. There becomes no barrier between privacy and technology and our lives are once again intertwined with surveillance and artificial intelligence. There is no separating one's identity anymore. Without consent, and without even asking, artificial intelligence and privacy and big data will invade on our everyday lives and create a new definition of human autonomy, identify, and authenticity.

Section Four: Intrinsic Objections of the Singularity and Privacy

Intrinsic concerns typically refer to objections to the technology itself. They are not concerned with what the technologies impacts might be. There are many objections to technological singularity on the grounds that we do not know the consequences of artificial intelligence and its effect on society. The main concern is that it will be difficult to produce a friendly AI. “Friendly” AI is intelligence that takes actions that are on the whole beneficial to humans and humanity. Movies depict real fear that humans have toward this technology. Take Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* for example. The book became a huge success and has been popular since its publication. Although the plot is far-fetched, AI could take a possible turn toward being unfriendly or harmful. Once artificial intelligence is programmed, there is no stopping its ultimate goal. If humans interfere with this goal, humanity could be in danger. Danger lurks behind privacy and big data as well. Technology that watches our every move can be dangerous. While the technology itself does not seem to represent harm, there is room for error. Data surveillance looks into personal data. If it corrupts the data that it is viewing than it could ultimately destroy necessary and important files.

These hypotheses are just that- opinions. There is no evidence that the singularity will bring harmful artificial intelligence, just as there is no concrete indication that proves data surveillance will ruin vital files. The debate over whether these technologies should be used continues. We will never live in a world without technology at this point in society. We will also never live in a world where privacy and big data will become obsolete. Regulations surrounding these technologies need to be the solution. The singularity, I feel, is inevitable. It is nearly impossible to stop the progression of technology once it has begun, and it has been on a fast track since the first computer was created. Within less than a decade we have gone from a

computer taking up a two-story basement to a handheld device with artificial intelligence.

Regulations need to be enforced on artificial intelligence and privacy and big data. We need to inform society on what these technologies are capable of and what they are already doing.

Artificial intelligence and privacy and big data may become intertwined in the future. Artificial intelligence encompasses a computer system that is able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. This includes speech recognition and visual perception. Data surveillance also incorporates these two systems. I would argue that in the near future these two technologies will blend to become one. The pace of technology is moving at such a rate that humans will ultimately not be able to keep up. Artificial intelligence will blend other technologies to become the best version of itself. Take the smartphone for example. Siri is a form of artificial intelligence. In the same device, there is a camera that can also record video. This is a type of surveillance that is already apart of the same device as artificial intelligence. If the singularity were to occur, super intelligence would need to incorporate forms of data surveillance to surpass technology that has already been created. I would argue that we would see this cohesion of technology sometime in the near future.

Although these technologies differ in society today, they will operate at vastly different rates in the future. Wallach brings up the point that humans cannot adapt and change in the same ways that technology progresses. How do we stop these technologies from slipping beyond human grasp? Placing regulations on these tools will allow humans time to understand these processes. Big data and privacy need to advertise what they are viewing and the purpose of the interrogations to the individuals they are investigating. AI singularity needs to be discussed and people need to understand what will happen when it occurs and how the government and society will go about adapting to the changes. Humans may not have much of a say in what happens

with the singularity and privacies matter, but we do have a right to understand what is happening in front of our own computer screens. The government needs to be more transparent in how they are using these technologies to benefit society and individuals. Under the fourth amendment, we have rights as citizens of the United States. The way these technologies are used now will not represent how they will be used in the future. It is up to the government and scientists to explain the implications of these technologies and how they will be used once we reach the point of singularity.

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Emma Dahlsten
Final Version of Utopia
Seminar on Utopian Thought and Globalization

“A World of Black and White”

The world smells of color. Our clothes are made of fabric neither soft nor coarse and are tailored to each body type. Holographic trees replicated from the 2000s scatter the Earth and release oxygen and nutrients essential for the survival of humankind. Families are chosen, or given; however, one prefers to live their life. If you choose to be alone, you simply make that decision as well. Our community is small, like many of the other surrounding regions. We specialize in water filtration and making sure that everyone has clean water to drink and bathe in and that none of that water goes to waste. At the center of the town, a purification system is set up and everyone in the community partakes in helping to filtrate and distribute the water to our neighbors. No one is asked. We understand that part of what makes a community thrive is pitching in to help with tasks that aid in our survival.

I head to what I have been taught is the beach. I walk down the sidewalk, a darker shade of white, and continue around the bend. Our world is black and white, but the beauty is in the shades of those two concepts. For centuries, no one could understand how to remove anger from the world. There were two wars that decided the fate of our planet. The first war occurred in the year 3050 when my grandmother was a young teenager. Artificial intelligence had leaked into

the wrong hands, and “they” had been using it to create social hierarchies that only the elite stood a chance at surviving. Humans became greedy over excess. Even if someone had enough for themselves and their family to survive, they were obsessed with whatever they could not or did not have. My grandmother refuses to talk about that time. She knew first hand how greed and excess could transform someone. Her brother was murdered by his best friend over a car. My grandmother will admit that the world she was raised in was a broken one. While cleanup crews had been working for generations to get rid of pollution, people always kept their attention focused on the future. No one was settled in their own version of reality. Virtual reality headsets became the norm and even schools were taught through virtual instruction. Every student had a headset they wore that explained basic math, grammar, and misconstrued historical views. My grandmother said that she would often keep her virtual reality turned on and wouldn’t communicate with anyone physically around her for days.

Her world had lost focus on what was directly in front of them. Technology, such as virtual headsets, created a new reality that no one could or wanted, to escape from. The idea of being mindfully present and thinking at the moment became a fable, until the war on AI. It lasted exactly six months until someone found an area of weakness within the levels of social command and almost overnight virtual headsets, and anything portraying a version other than the present went completely black. Chaos ensued, and the violence became worse. People were forced to face one another and communicate without having readily accessible technology by their fingertips to distract themselves. It was a time when people had to reconnect with even their family members. Grandma Judy said that after the first couple of years, her family celebrated her birthday all physically and mindfully present in the same room for the first time.

After a while, she said that people slowly emerged from their houses. My great grandmother even started a community garden in their area and for the first time, my grandmother met her neighbors that had lived beside her family for more than ten years. While the violence was still occurring, Grandma Judy said that people finally began to communicate with one another- for a couple of years. The second war came twenty years later. My mother was a young girl and humanity had become restless. My grandmother describes it as time in limbo. Society had slowly started to rebuild, and people were becoming more interested in their surroundings and creating actual relationships with other humans.

However, humanity also became bored. Without technology, their minds went from complete stimulation to having to entertain themselves with other people and the outside. My grandmother said that the only people that were content were readers. They had a sense of imagination and liked to read and write about places that gave their lives purpose and fulfillment. Artists were the innovators in the new world. Taking constructs that they had learned from books and implementing them in their surroundings. They were the ones that brought up the idea of no color. Descriptions and words were enough to relate and understand each other and taking away color would give everyone equal opportunity to view the world the same way artists did and help eliminate anger.

Artists were historically non-violent people. They did not want a war full of blood, but rather a war fueled by discussion and challenging opinions and perceptions of stereotypes. A new type of “war” was created. One where neither side held guns, or ammo, but both held ideas and opinions on how to change humanity’s awareness of the world around them. This war was not without physical violence but focused more on changing the world through voice. The war

went on for twenty years. Every individual felt like they had a voice on the changes that were to occur. Any opinion no matter how outrageous, or minimal, was heard by everyone. Councils that had been set up in the early stages of the war had phased out when everyone understood that no one held more rank than the other. Through this recognition, a new world was created and agreed upon by those who wanted to live in it. Of course, there are outsiders to every community. Color is not far from the imaginary borders in our neighborhood, but it is not easy to rebel against a set of beliefs the majority of the whole world agreed upon.

The first shade to vanish was yellow. I remember my teacher describing the color of sunflowers. I know how they felt. Soft, like velvet. She told us to imagine the feeling when our mother or father gave us a hug. How it felt to run barefoot for the first time through a patch of grass that wasn't holographic. How the small blades that looked like spikes were comforting on the soles of our feet. I remember my first time visiting the community garden in the AI buildings. My mother gave my sister and me specific instructions on how to maneuver the park. All was guarded by a thick cut piece of glass with posters warning us not to take too long exploring a piece of history. I remember peeling off the slick padding of my shoes and looking to my mother for permission. Tight-lipped, she smiled and nodded toward the entrance of the square box. It wasn't big like our classrooms, or home quarters, but it was enough for five adults or ten children to explore. I grabbed my sister's hand and we stepped inside a sealed door. A small spray released from the ceiling and coated our body and clothes in a light layer of white. My sister, smaller than me, but with the same excitement pushed me toward the door that was slowly opening in front of us. The first step felt mushy. The shining light ran through me and I had to squint to take in the aroma of the room. Scents I had never known existed passed through my

nostrils and into my brain where I would lock them forever. I bent down to run my hands through what was labeled “grass”. It was bristly but forgiving. I watched my sister run in a maze through the room. She quickly stopped at a plant with a thick stem. It was her exact height. She closed her eyes and leaned into the dark spot in the middle of the flower- a sunflower. I watched as her fingers curled around the stem and then opened to embrace the petals. She was so still; so delicate. This is what yellow smells like.

I reached the opening after the bend and take in the scenery. A small breeze ran through me and the hairs on the back of my neck raised to meet it. I continued onto the sand that had been packed so tightly it felt no different than the sidewalk. I sat down and positioned myself toward the large black waves in front of me. I close my eyes and inhale the feelings of blue. After the initial frenzy of losing yellow, blue was the next step. In our history lessons, the teachers say that “they”, whoever “they” were, wanted to start with a color they thought was harmless, then move to something drastic. My mother was young but says she can still remember losing blue. She told us that her mother had eyes like the sea. How when she peered into them she felt calm. My mother doesn’t often tell us about how she personally remembers colors, but blue is the one that reveals her emotions the best. The one that best reveals our ancestors to my sister and me. She told us about the day that she came home, and her mother’s irises were only slightly darker than the whites in her eyes. How she immediately started scratching her mother’s face so harshly she drew blood. Red- a color she could still see. She told us how her mother picked her up and gently rocked her in her arms. How the tears that ran down her cheeks tasted of salt and anger scents she so strongly recognizes now. I stare into the water in front of me. It feels cold but fresh. I run my hand along the edge and try and hold the scent to my face. I breathe deeply and taste the same salt my mother described to me. Images of her holding me and

cradling me in her arms when I was sad, or feeling a little down, rush to the front of my mind. How the touch of her skin was so soft against my cheek brushing away the tears after someone teased me or I was frustrated. I bring the water to my face and let the scent wash over me. I feel blue running over my skin. I smell blue running through my memories. I know that the shade is darker than white, and because I know no better, the smell and feel of blue is enough.

Green was the next shade to leave. This was important because, with color vanishing, money also became obsolete. Money sounded confusing, like how paper could hold so much weight behind what kind of person you could or couldn't be. From what Grandma Judy tells me, it seemed that money ran the world. She said that you needed it to buy food, shelter, and most anything to be able to survive. I asked her how something that seemed so important suddenly lost all of its meaning.

I will never forget when she peered into my eyes and told me,

“There are times when I cry for you. For your sister, Hannah. I never wanted you to choose a world without color, but then there are times that I am grateful for it. You do not have to live your life scared of what happens if your money is taken from you. You don't have to live with the feelings of inadequacy or depression because you can't support your family. When green disappeared, all the greed and evil went with it. Money no longer became something people felt held any weight. As a community, we decided it was not needed anymore. I did not want the next generation of children, my grandchildren, to live with the burden of money or green any longer.”

My mother says that she remembers green, but she was young. She says that she remembers how the paper bills felt light in the palm of her hand. I laughed when I found out that money was simply paper. How could something mean so much when it was so easily

disposable? Other shades were erased quickly after that. People were uneasy not knowing which color was going to be next while watching hues vanishing to a certain shade of white or black in front of their eyes. The last vibrant color to leave was red. My mother says she felt that “they” were using people as test monkeys. Taking in observations and surveys about their feelings and emotions when red was the only color left to witness. My mother said it was a confusing time for everyone because red could mean and smell so many different things. One of my teachers said that they should not teach us the smell of red till we are older; at least into our pre-teen years, if not later. Another teacher said they should teach us red at the earliest age possible so that we can understand how it functions for ourselves. My mother stays quiet on the issue, but that may be because she is soft-spoken. After hearing my mother discuss blue, I was not sure if I wanted to put her through the same emotional stress when asking her about the color red. I could see her eyes change to darker shades when I asked her about colors, but I could never understand the smell of her frustration. She didn’t need to feel bad for us. We only knew the life that was before us. I was happy. My sister was happy. My friends were happy knowing the life that we have is harmonious.

My grandmother will discuss red. She has a serious distaste for it. Grandma Judy never claims to be a pre-religious person, but she said life after the first war made a lot of people procreate. Religion had phased out when my grandmother was young, and she said that groups of people whose parents enforced religious beliefs, such as no sex before marriage, felt liberated from holy moral obligations. When I was old enough, she asked me to describe to her what it felt like when our parents took us camping. I told her that there was nothing to do. The trees smelled nice, but my sister and I could not physically touch them. The tent was cozy, but hard to put up and the small beds we bring to sleep in are uncomfortable. I told her that I felt restless. That my

sister and I had to create games in our head to entertain ourselves and even that wouldn't keep our attention. She told me that was how her generation felt. Always in a constant state of unrest, looking for anything to fill the void of boredom. She told me that this led to more babies. Too many babies that people could not or did not want to properly raise. Food was more scarce but still available. However, greed came back into the lives of humanity. People started to become violent over resources that were obtainable. That is when humans decided their families. It is not too different from how it always was, except more people in a household to ban together and parent the children.

Grandma Judy's generation became eager to raise the next generation. They had lived through the hard times and wanted to see the result of all their suffering. They created systems for a community to follow if they wanted to prosper and feed their families. People visited AI buildings to learn how to grow holographic community gardens that produced printed edible food. Grandma's generation became educated on how to sustain a whole new generation. We never have to worry about food, or water, or having shelter over our heads. What really scared me were the history lessons our teachers made us listen to; the pictures of people who looked like they had not showered in months holding small cups up for money. The first thing my grandmother said about red was that overpopulation was no longer a problem once it was gone. She said that red could provoke and smell like a lot of emotions; sometimes those feelings would become too overwhelming.

I vividly remember the time she grabbed my hands and told me to imagine all the smells and scents that I know colliding into each other and running through my body all at once. What she was asking me to do was impossible, but I tried to imagine it. I thought of the anger and sadness of blue, of the happiness and innocence of yellow, of the freshness and greediness of

green. My body started to ache, and I felt my temperature begin to rise. I opened my eyes and my grandmother told me to shut them again. She told me to dig deeper into this anguish. To understand and smell all these emotions mixed into one. I thought of pink and felt warmth between my thighs. I smelt the taste of my first kiss and then the heartache of when I understood that it would not last. I conjured the smell of purple and felt powerful and creative. I smelt the stroke of an artist's brush mixed in with frustration, lust, innocence and when it all felt and smelt too much I understood.

When I opened my eyes, a single tear ran down my cheek. My grandmother was blinking back her own tears and said to me "This, my child, is red."

There is a small community only a few miles out of our town that has color named Dystrope. Our community does not talk about them very much, but we do leave water right on the edge of their town. Longboarded planks surround the area so that no color can be viewed from the outside. When it is my turn in the rotation to drop water off at their area, I always linger a little longer around the perimeter. I place my hand on the big wooden boards and close my eyes. I inhale deeply and try and notice if this place smells any different. If the colors in this town are worth throwing up these big barriers and not living harmoniously like the rest of our community. I cannot say that I haven't thought about entering the space. Our community has no rules, only guidelines that most of us choose to stand by so that we do not upset the balance. There is nothing stating that we can't enter these walls, however, we do not talk about it. What is the point of seeing color if you have no one to converse about it with everyone in your community?

Today, the color of blue is still at the forefront of my mind. The sea is calm and smells just how I remember it. I place my hand on the hard sand to help lift me up and walk down to the filtration site. Hannah is going to meet me and our rounds are close to the Dysthrope community. The name is another aspect that upsets the community I live in. While no one in Dysthrope admits the name originates from dystopia, it is pretty clear the message they are trying to send. When my grandmother's generation created this world, they never defined it as a utopia. There was only a vision of what people wanted their ideal world to look like. When this community, and others like it, could not seem to get on board with losing color, they were extremely irritated with having to leave. Grandma Judy tells me that certain people tried to convince them to stay and verbally work through their concerns, but that ultimately these communities tend to hold the most stubborn of all people. My grandmother has visited them once while on vacation. While she was not supposed to talk to anyone about it, she told me that she would never return. She told me that the people there felt they held a higher position in society because they still got to see color. My grandmother said she felt sick to her stomach. That they bragged about all that they had, and almost pitied my grandmother for choosing a lifestyle without color. Now that I am older, I wonder how much of that is true. Grandma Judy has started to lose her eyesight completely, and I wonder if a fresh pair of eyes would change the viewpoint on this group of people.

As I walk to the filtration site, I glance around to see how our community has changed. The sidewalks are long and stretch on for what feels like miles. The houses, or rather buildings, are aligned side by side with many doors and windows to allow light to shine through. Holographic trees and gardens flow almost everywhere, although when you touch them you feel nothing. It smells like springtime, my grandmothers favorite season. She said that my

grandfather would bring her a fresh rose every day on his way home from work. She said they felt like sunflowers, soft and delicate. She said that they also came in different colors, but red was her husband's favorite. She said she never minded the red of the roses because they resembled love and connection, they resembled the way she felt about my grandfather.

I continue walking until I see the large black structure in the middle of our community. Grandma Judy said that it took over ten years to build this machine and that it is worth all the labor that was put into it. I sit down by a patch of holographic grass and wait for Hannah. We started distributing water as soon as we were able to walk. Our parents guided us on all the surrounding trails and even told us shortcuts on how to make it to the different neighborhoods. We started going on routes alone when I was eight and Hannah was five. She always had a fascination with the large gates at Dystrope. Her little eyes would wonder at the tall peaks of the fence and beg me to let her see inside. It was not that I was afraid of what was inside, I was afraid that our world would never seem the same to her if she saw it. The older we grew, the more I felt that the decision was hers alone to make. If she wanted to see the town for herself, then she would have to be old enough to make her own decisions.

“Alex! Sorry I'm late, Edna wanted to show me this new books she's reading and we lost track of time.”

I smile as I watch my sister jogging over to where I'm sitting.

“No problem, Han. I was just taking in all the smells of spring.”

She sits next to me on the patch of grass and gazes out. Whenever she gets a chance she will sit in silence and stare off for hours at a time.

“Time to go,” I say, standing up and smoothing out the creases in my suit.

“Where to first?” Hannah asks, standing beside me and reaching into her satchel for the reusable buckets.

“Well, I think we should start east and make our way in a circle until Dysthrope. The sun will be going down by then, so better to stay close to what we know.”

There are different distributors for different times of the day. Our community has a schedule that we try to stick to, although no one is perfect. Hannah unpacks the container we use to haul the water. It is small and compact, but when unfolded and put together it can hold enough water for all the communities on our route for a couple of days. The container is designed to be light, so even small children can roll it and the top is sealed tightly so no water can spill out. We fill the container until the sign tells us it is full. I check my bag one more time for all the supplies we need.

“All set?” Hannah asks.

“All good. Let’s get going.”

We start our route along the long sandy paths that reach the other communities. Grandma Judy’s generation set up these paths so that everything we need for trade is easily accessible. The ground is soft and gets re-sanded every couple of months. Our shoes are made to maneuver any type of terrain, but the soft sand makes it more comfortable for longer routes. As we leave the community the holographic trees become denser. The smell of springtime fills the air and a gentle breeze whisks the perspiration from my forehead. I can hear the sound of birds chirping in the distance. They are calm and reassuring. When I was in grade eight, a rumor went around that a bear had been sighted close to our community. Grandma Judy laughed when I told her this and simply told me that no one had seen bears, deer’s, or any other animal found in our forests in over one hundred years. However, she did tell me it was possible so that always left me feeling

unsettled. Hannah is a few strides ahead of me as usual. She has always moved quickly and is even faster when she is not paying attention. I fall back and let her stay a few paces ahead of me. The sand is soft on my feet and the birds chirping lulls me into a steady rhythm of placing one foot in front of the other and pulling the container behind me.

After we reach our first destination Hannah pulls the bucket out of her satchel. She puts it together in record time and we dump out the rationed water for the community. Each neighborhood is different in size; therefore they get their water accordingly. Hannah and I have gotten our route down to a specific routine. On longer routes, I carry the container and she places the buckets together and we both pour out the water. She is quicker at putting the buckets together, but I am better at handling the container. We move through the day in sync. We drop off the allotted water at all of the locations until we have reached our last destination. The day has turned to dusk and an orange hue falls over the forest. The birds have gone back to their homes and all I can hear are my footsteps quiet in the sand. I call Hannah's name to see how far ahead she is, but I do not hear her answer. My heart begins to beat a little faster. I saw her silhouette only ten minutes ago.

"Hannah! I can't see you. Stop and wait for me wherever you are!" I yell, only slightly louder than I intended.

I hear some movement a few yards in front of me and start jogging to try and catch up. While I am grateful for the sand, my padded shoes make it hard to run as fast as I want to.

"Alex! Come here!" Hannah screams from a distance.

I start running as fast as my feet will carry me through the thick sand. Small beads get stuck in the soles of my feet, but I carry on. Hannah's voice seemed hesitant and negative thoughts course through my mind. When I reach the bend in the road I shout Hannah's name.

“I’m over here!” Her voice carries through the breeze.

I take a quick left and see Hannah holding her shin by the gates of Dysthrope.

“Hannah, what happened? What did you do?”

“I was just curious...I swear!” She replies, holding her leg.

I bend down to inspect her wound. A tear in her suit allows me to see a pool of black flowing out of her cut and down her leg. Our suits are made to protect the body against corners and anything sharp, so I’m immediately confused. As I am about to ask her what happened, I look up and see the large wooden posts. Along with having color, Dysthrope doesn’t believe in holographic trees or our suits. Their fence is not programmed to support our protective suits, so they are useless in the area surrounding their community. I stare at the gash on her leg as she looks away. I reach into my satchel to grab the first aid kit.

“You know you didn’t have to climb it. You can just knock on the door, they let you in.”

Hannah looks down sheepishly and says, “I know. I just thought I’d be quick enough and you would never know. I can’t help myself. I don’t feel things the same way you do Alex.”

I take out a cloth with disinfectant and start dabbing Hannah’s wound. I know what she says is true. I read a lot, and she’s more interested in staring into space and questioning her surroundings. I can’t describe to her what colors mean to me, and it is about time she sees for herself.

“I think you might need stitches. The disinfectant isn’t working as fast as it needs to and I know Dysthrope has medical care. If you want, I’ll wait outside while you get treated.”

Hannah looked into my eyes and knew that I was lying. Her wound had already begun to close, but I was finally giving her the opportunity.

“You really think so? I don’t want mom or dad to get angry...or you.”

“Really, your medical attention is top of my concerns. I don’t mind waiting” I said to her and winked. It was time for her to view this world on her own and I wasn’t going to be the one to stop her.

“If you really think its okay, I’ll go. But I will only be thirty minutes- an hour tops!”

Hannah says as she springs from the ground and to the gates of Dystrope. I smile and wave and she turns to the door ready to knock. She brings her fist close to the wooden gate and hesitates. She looks back to me, I nod, and she knocks three times at the front of the gates. I turn away and turn back once I’ve heard the door loudly close. I reach into my satchel and pull out my book. I thumb through the pages and lose track of time when I hear a siren sound, letting me know that the door was about to open. I shut my eyes and wait for Hannah to appear by my side.

“Alex! It’s okay, the doors shut!”

I open my eyes to see my sister on her knees and smiling.

“So? How was it?” I ask.

Hannah looks away before turning back to me.

“Really, Hannah, it’s all right. You’re my sister. You can tell me. Was it everything you imagined?” I ask her.

She leans close to my ear and whispers, “It was magical. Yellow is everything I thought it was.”

I lean back and look into her eyes. They sparkle a certain shade of white and I notice her dimples are deeper and more apparent on her face.

“Alex it was just everything I thought that it was, but it was strange. Everyone in there is just like us, except they have color. Yellow is warm, I saw the sun! I actually saw the sun- well a

sun they created. But it was bright, and they gave me these glasses to wear, but it was real. I felt it. It was so warm, and it glowed. But it was so, so bright...”

I stared into my sister’s eyes and held her hands.

“I know, Alex. I know what yellow is like. Close your eyes now and feel it. Don’t think of the color, just feel.”

She closed her eyes and grasped my hands a little tighter. We sat in silence for what felt like hours. I pried my eyes open every couple of minutes to check her reaction. Her face was calm. She was so serene. I remembered the first time I watched her touch a real sunflower and the warmth spread through me. I begged that warmth to flow into my sister- into her mind, into her consciousness, into her words. If she chooses to live in Dystrope, we would still see each other, but it would make our lives so different. Finally, she squeezed my hands and we both opened our eyes.

“I think I finally understand it, Alex. The color was so vibrant, but when I think about it, it truly hurt my eyes. I know I’m not adjusted, but it wasn’t the color that was missing. It was that feeling. I don’t take the time to feel things the way you do. When I looked at my leg, I saw red. I don’t know what I expected, but it made me feel more pain. Our community, our family, you... changing my world just to see color isn’t worth changing the relationship I have with you.” Hannah said, wrapping her long arms around mine.

I closed my eyes and we sat in that embrace for a long time. Small tears drifted down my cheeks, but I didn’t bother to wipe them away. We broke apart and both laughed when we noticed how dark it had gotten.

“Good thing I always bring a flashlight.” I said, pulling out the gadget from my bag. I

flicked the switch on and a bright white illuminated the blackness that surrounded us. I helped my sister off the ground and we walked hand in hand down the white sandy path that guided us back to our colorless, yet harmonious, community.

My grandmother and mother with their memories of colors have said many times that the hate and love in the world have neutralized. How we are lucky to be able to feel and understand so deeply what our world means and what we mean as human beings. She said that much has changed, but “they” have not taken our way of being real. I love the world before me- the smells of all the colors, the emotions of all the people. We understand one another on a deeper level now and recognize that while we may not be able to see the red that runs through our bodies, we know that we all still bleed just the same.

Emma Dahlsten
“Tender Kentucky”
Creative Writing

Carrie tilts her head on the back of the vinyl seat on Bus 109 and breathes deeply for the first time in two weeks. The collar of her pressed white uniform is smudged with day old makeup and tears. Her shifts at Memorial Hospital are becoming longer and her patience shorter for the everyday cold and flu vaccinations. She lets her head roll until the tip of her nose touches the frosted glass. Her eyes flutter open to see a man in his seventies, draped in a loose cotton, stare back at her and wave. The man gives a one-toothed grin and turns his back, shielding whatever sits behind his tall frame. She allows her eyelids to become heavy and falls asleep to the soft lull of the buses engine as it trucks through Louisville, Kentucky.

“Carrie?” The bus driver asks, gently nudging her shoulder.

She awakes wearily and is greeted by Darrin’s warm smile.

“Now I know you like riding my bus, but I do believe you may have stayed on a little longer than you bargained for today.”

Carrie shifts her weight and presses a hand to the now ice-cold window. She looks to Darrin and then back to the blackness of the outside. The silhouette of her fingertips makes the window look like stained glass.

“Where are we?” She asks, trying to sound sweet, yet bold.

"Well, we're about a mile back from where you normally get off. I'd offer to take you back, but they've been on me about getting this bus back to the station on time. You have anyone you can call?"

Carrie presses her lips together and feels the heat of her breath on her chin as she exhales. “I’ll be all right. Only spent sixteen hours on my feet today, what’s another hour?” Carrie replies, looking at Darrin’s furrowed brow.

“You sure? There’s a payphone just outside this bus stop. I’ll wait while you call if you’d like. I don’t like the looks of the night at this hour.”

Carrie lifts her slight frame and feels her bones adjusting to being upright once again. “Really, Darrin, I’ll be all right. Gotta keep you around. You’re the one bus driver that doesn’t let anyone take coins out of my purse when I doze off.”

“Alright now,” Darrin replies, “Just know I better see you on this same route tomorrow. You workin’ another long one?” He asks.

“It’s my day off,” Carrie replies, smiling, and letting that thought carry her feet to the front of the bus and down the steps.

“I’ll see you Tuesday!” Carrie waves as Darrin shakes his head and gently closes the doors.

Carrie takes a moment to adjust to her surroundings. She pulls her lightweight knitted cardigan closer to her body. Kentucky turned to winter overnight and she is not prepared. Not that she ever was, but at this moment, she curses herself for not believing the attractive weatherman on the channel five news. Her white stockings keep her calves from greeting the November wind too harshly, and her nurse's shoes are made for walking, so she deems herself half lucky. Carrie slips her hand into the pocket of her starched dress and rubs two dimes together. The phone booth in front of her has a dim overhead light. It looks sad and lonely but also gives her space to avoid the cold. She repeats Richard’s number in her head and walks slowly into the booth. Her cold fingers feel warm against the metal dimes as she pushes them into the slot. She prays while the phone rings and is not surprised when a nasal voice answers.

“Hello?” a woman replies. A voice Carrie recognizes all too well.

Carrie carefully places the phone back on the receiver without saying a word. She hoped Nancy wouldn't answer, but a part of her knew that she would always be the only woman to answer his phone line. She shoves her hands back into her uniform and heads in the direction that Darrin pointed. She feels silly for oversleeping but welcomes this time of solitude. She has now lived in Louisville for six months. It is just enough time to become an overworked ER nurse and a mistress to the head doctor. Well, maybe not anymore. She feels tears sting the back of her eyes for the second time today and forces them back. If Richard wanted to break things off for good, then he would not have offered to take her out later this week to talk. She follows the road and feels the concrete push harder on the soles of her feet. She finds a small rock to kick just a few feet in front of her. She keeps her chin down, kicking the rock when she notices the streetlamps becoming further apart. She has been walking for about a half-mile and still does not recognize the empty buildings around her. She looks over her shoulder and notes that the road looks identical to any other paved street she has walked on since moving to Kentucky.

Carrie opens her purse and counts her money. Two quarters, a dime, and one penny. She considers turning around and walking back to the payphone to call one of her friends from work but cannot remember any of their numbers from memory. Her watch reads midnight and she can feel the glare of the moon reflect a slight glow on her porcelain face. Richard always tells her she reminds him of the glass dolls his mother keeps polished and stored in her china cabinet that are beautiful, yet fragile. Her eyes are full, and her lips painted a perfect crimson. Every morning she carefully winds her strawberry hair into a top bun and fastens it down with a few barrettes, and sometimes just a pen if she is in a hurry. She carefully unclips her hair and lets her thick curls wrap around her neck and shoulders like a blanket. Her teeth begin to chatter and her only hope is that she is headed in the right direction down the flat paved road.

Carrie begins to hum an old tune her father taught her when was younger. She continues to kick the small rock when she kicks it too far. She loses it in the pitch black of the space between the streetlamps. She raises her chin and shudders when she sees an outline of a shadow. It appears small, but too distant to make a real guess. She crosses the street and begins to hum a little louder. If she doesn't raise her head to acknowledge whatever it is, maybe it will just go away. She glances to the empty fields surrounding her and sees nowhere that would conceal her small frame. There is a pond a few hundred yards away, but her best guess is that it is frozen and if not she would freeze before being able to walk and get help. She watches the shadow out of the corner of her eye become bigger. It is definitely the outline of a man, or possibly two women huddled together. Should she call out a warning? Start talking crazy so they may leave her alone?

The shadow is now only a few yards away. The man is walking slowly and in no particular direction. If he has seen her, he does not let on that he is making any moves to approach her. Carrie moves her feet as fast as she can, but the cold has forced her to slow down. She breathes deep and feels the pang of winter and terror residing at the back of her throat. She walks through the light of the streetlamp and into the darkness, the exact time the figure enters the same dark space. She feels his presence overhanging like a large canopy. She can see the next streetlamp in sight; if she runs now she can catch the light. She begins to jog as they pass each other on opposite sides of the street. He does not walk to her side of the road but stops and she can feel his stare on her back as she runs into the yellow hue of the streetlight. She does not know what forces her to do it, but she turns around to see where the figure has gone.

“Miss?” A deep voice echoes somewhere from the darkness of the road.

“Miss, I don’t wanna scare you. Just wonderin’ if you had some change you could spare? I could play you a nice song if you like in exchange? I just need to make it to the payphone to call my daughter. Please.”

Carrie’s breath stops. She is torn between the sincerity in the man’s voice and her father’s words ringing in the back of her mind. Always put yourself first Carrie. If a man does something you don’t like, put yourself first. Remember how strong you are. Putting herself first meant running and getting the hell away from this man. But apart of her stayed glued to the concrete road. She felt her legs heavy and her heart hurt for the ache in this mans voice. A pain she felt deeply but could not understand why.

“I’m gonna stay under this light here Sir. I don’t know what it is, but your voice is making me go against my better judgment. I’m gonna leave some coins right here on the ground, okay? You can come and pick them up. But come slow and I’m gonna step back here so don’t come too close.” Carrie replies to the man as she slowly places a quarter and a dime on the ground where she is standing.

"Alright, I'm going to start walking toward you. I promise I'm a man of God and wouldn't do nothing to hurt a lady. Especially a nurse. I believe in the work you do, and you're being a kind soul to help me out."

Carrie watches his movements and true to his word he moves leisurely. Her heart beats through the fabric of her uniform. She tightly twirls a loose thread at the bottom of her pocket and can feel the pressure in her fingertips build. Maybe he thinks she has a knife? As long as she makes her pockets look bigger, he has no idea what she may be capable of. She backs further from the light as he slowly approaches and for the first time she can make out his features. Her

back foot weakens as she notices he is the same man she recognizes earlier from the bus. His beard is gray and hangs down to his chest. His hair is long and pokes out like thin pieces of fine wire. He is draped in brown cotton down to his sturdy boots and Carrie realizes that this man is strong but tranquil. All the fear begins to leave her body and curiosity sets in.

“What are you doing walking these roads so late?” Carrie asks the man as he bends down to pick up the change.

He smiles to reveal his one tooth, “You know, I could ask you the same thing?”

“I overslept. On the bus, I’ve been working all night. I like to walk, though, it gives me time to think and I like the quiet.” Carrie replies, unsure of why she is telling him that last part.

“I see that. I do believe I saw you from the window earlier.” He replies.

Carrie suddenly remembers he was shielding something. However, maybe not intentionally now that she notices he stands a little bit above six feet.

“What was it you were standing in front of?” She asks.

The man grins and winces as he bends down to sit on the curb.

“Ah, you must be talking about the ole girl here.” He twirls around a woven purple strap to reveal a black case.

“This is my Trombone. Call her Ms. Fitz. She’s real smooth and keeps me company on cold nights like tonight.”

Carrie watches as he gingerly opens the case. She wonders what her father would think of her standing in the middle of the road at night talking to a black man playing a strange instrument all alone.

“I thought you had to call your daughter? Isn’t it a little late to play that?”

“Just need to give these knees a rest. There’s never a bad time to play. And from oversleeping on the bus, I’d say you could use a little break as well. You don’t have to sit next to me, but do you mind if I play a little?”

Carrie glances toward the opposite end of the road. It is darker, but she could still see the man and she is interested to hear what he might play.

“Alright, but I’m going to sit over here. And just a song or two, seeing as I have the day off tomorrow.”

The man nods and unhooks his case. He carefully picks up the trombone and uses a small velvet square to clean the brass. He licks his lips and inhales deeply before pressing his mouth to the instrument.

Carrie closes her eyes as a strong tune emerges from the darkness. Soulful jazz flows through the coldness and warms Carrie from the inside out. She lets her mind wander to the waves of the rich and deep vibrato. She opens her eyes to watch the man with his eyes closed become one with the trombone. He looks younger and blissful. She immediately recalls her younger self, sitting by her father’s chair as he sipped whiskey neat and played jazz from the record.

“What is the name of that piece?” Carrie asks the man as he finishes.

He replies loudly, “Why, Miss, “Tenderly”! Don’t tell me you’ve heard it? Although I wouldn’t be too surprised. Just tell me you like it!”

Carrie smiles, “My father used to play that on the record player. It was one of his favorites.”

“It’s a favorite of a lot of people. Have to say Ella Fitzgerald does my favorite version though.” He says, laughing and rubbing the smudges off his instrument once again.

Carrie smiles, “We played it at his funeral a couple months ago. I never knew why he liked it so much, but I never thought it’d follow me all the way to Kentucky.”

He looks up from his instrument and into her face with a sincerity that makes Carrie look away.

“I’m sorry to hear that. A relationship between father and daughter is a real strong one. Important too.”

Carrie picks herself from the curb and walks closer to the man.

"My names Carrie," She says, extending her hand.

“Names Charles,” He replies.

Carrie notices the difference in their tones. Her pale skin compared to the richness of his palm.

“You play beautifully.”

“Thank you, Carrie. Do you mind if I give you something?”

Carrie nods her head, “Sure.”

Charles reaches into his satchel and takes out a small origami bird. He refolds one of the wings and hands it to her.

“For you,” he says.

Carrie takes the delicate paper bird and holds it close to her face to inspect.

“It’s beautiful, Charles. Although I’m not entirely sure why you chose to give me this gift?”

Charles clasps the locks on his case and slowly rises from the curb. He closes his satchel and slings it over his shoulder.

“Just a little something to remind you that even though things may look small and breakable, they can be much stronger than they appear,” he says and begins to whistle as he walks and disappears into the darkness of that long Kentucky road.