

# ReCUR

Red Cedar Undergraduate Research

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Michigan State University

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## About ReCUR

ReCUR is an annual publication of the Michigan State University Honors College that highlights the diversity and quality of our students' research and creative endeavors. Each issue of ReCUR accepts submissions from Honors College students and from participants in university-wide research and creative arts forums. In addition to providing students an outlet for publication of their work, ReCUR offers students an opportunity to learn about publication in a scholarly journal from multiple viewpoints: as a submitter, a member of the student editorial board or editorial staff.

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## About the front cover

### The Wonder of the Snowflake



While working on Project 365, a project that requires me to take a picture of something every day for one year, I shot this image. One cold February day, on my way to class, a snowflake landed on my mitten so perfectly that I had to take a picture. This image exemplifies one of the many lessons I have learned from this project; everyday has something beautiful in

it, some image worth being captured, some memory worth remembering, all you have to do is look for it.

—April Korneli

## About the back cover

### Weaving Tropics

This half repeat textile print design will whisk you away to lands of lush tropical foliage and waters clear as crystal. Every part of the design is made from a combination of elements from another part, together the result is oh so tropical. With the idea of interdependence within an ecosystem in mind, and the want to create a design with an integrated figure foreground and background relationship, repeated leaf motifs are used that overlap and weave over and under each other.

—Audrey Emiko Owada



# Involving Undergraduate Students in Research

Michael Thoennesen | Physics and Astronomy

When students enter college at a major research university, they enter a new world full of exciting opportunities to learn firsthand about the latest developments and discoveries in a large variety of disciplines. In addition to offering these students a broad educational experience and teaching them the fundamentals necessary to advance in their chosen fields, it is important to spark their interest in and expose them to cutting-edge research. Regular classes and introductory lab courses typically cannot convey this excitement. Labs are important to teach the basic skills but are normally not closely related to the most recent advances and do not use the most modern equipment.

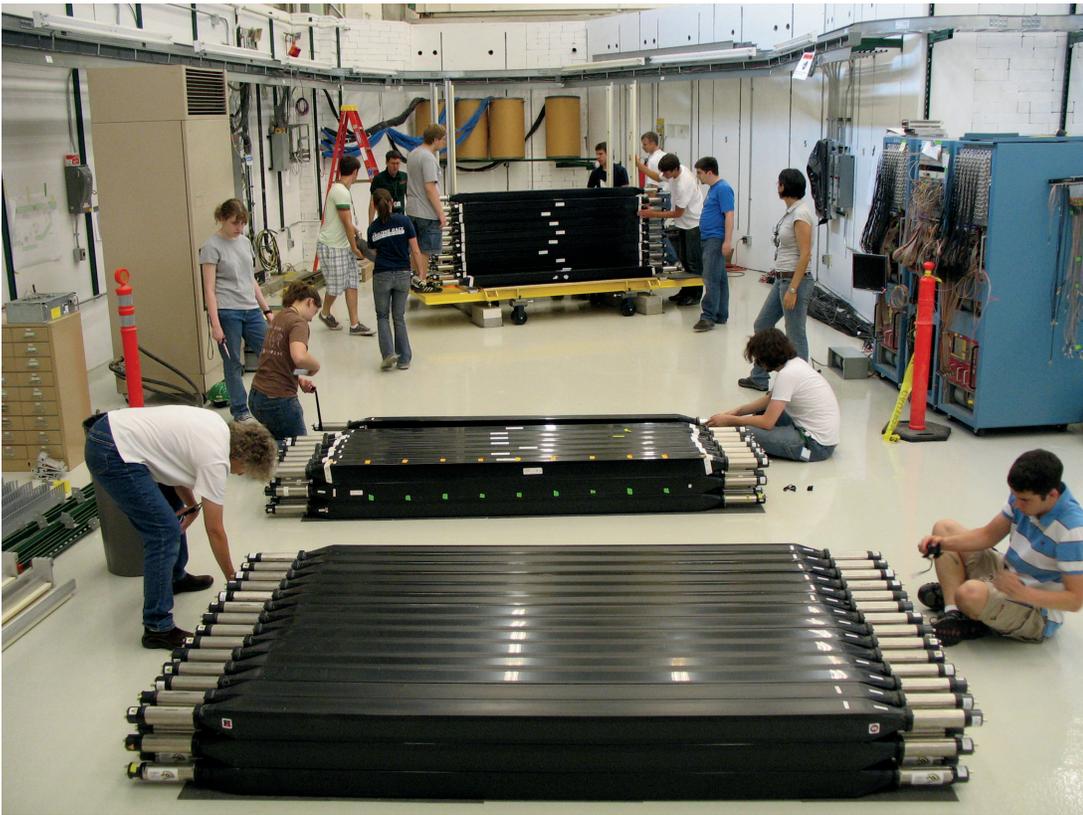
As a physics major in college—admittedly a fairly long time ago—I specifically remember one experience. In an introductory lab, I once carried out an experiment that involved counting hundreds of pendulum oscillations. Using just a stopwatch to roughly measure the period of the oscillation, we determined  $g$ , the gravitational acceleration on earth. It was rote, tedious, and only roughly accurate work. It was not an experience that inspired me to pursue a career in physics. What did, however, encourage me to continue with the subject was the university's small 10-megavolt tandem particle accelerator in the basement of the physics department, where actual nuclear physics experiments were performed around the clock. Researchers talked in group seminars about using the machine to make miniexplosions that mimicked, albeit on a modest scale, some of the more extreme processes in the cosmos. The idea was profound enough to fire my imagination. The environment was stimulating and exciting: working with sophisticated electronics and data acquisition, watching professionals tuning the beam, waiting in anticipation of “Beam-on-target,” taking data during long night shifts, and so forth. Indeed, I spent a lot of time in this basement—a place that in many ways was the origin of my career as a nuclear physicist.

As a major research university, MSU is in an ideal situation to offer students similar research experiences.

For example, at the NSCL (National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory)—which is currently the largest university-based nuclear science facility in the United States and trains about 10 percent of all nuclear science PhDs in the country—we realize the importance of research opportunities for undergraduate students. Undergraduate students are an integral part of the lab, where they can gain experience in many different fields; for example, nuclear physics, nuclear chemistry, astrophysics, accelerator physics, and mechanical and electrical engineering. We offer undergraduates the chance to produce real, publishable research that focuses on questions of central interest to our department's research. We currently have more than thirty



Photo by Bryan Luther at Concordia College



*Photo by Thomas Baumann at Michigan State University*

MSU undergraduate students involved in research projects at NSCL. In addition, every summer another thirty undergraduate students from other universities around the country and the world come to the lab to work closely with NSCL faculty gaining valuable research experience.

One specific project that I have been involved in is the MoNA (modular neutron array) collaboration. It was recently augmented with LISA (large-area multi-institutional scintillator array), and together this \$2 million array consists of 288 plastic scintillator bars each two meters in length. Its main purpose is to detect fast neutrons from the decay of neutron-rich exotic nuclei produced in projectile fragmentation reactions, which are a particular specialty of the NSCL's coupled cyclotron facility. Given that most detectors in accelerator facilities are built by trained engineers or scientists at universities or high-tech companies, MoNA/LISA is unique in that it was largely built by undergraduates from around the United States. The students worked in parallel to build MoNA/LISA's individual detector modules at their home institutions. They then traveled to Michigan to deliver the modules and assemble the array. After the completion, students continue to be involved by taking part in experiments and in performing analyses on the experimental data. More than one hundred undergraduate students have so far

participated in MoNA/LISA, and close to half of those have gone on to graduate physics programs. A description of this collaborative approach to undergraduate research can be found in an article in the American Journal of Physics (Howes et al. 2005) and in the Journal of College Teaching & Learning (Voss et al. 2008). The author of the latter article was an undergraduate student from Central Michigan University who recently graduated from MSU with a PhD in nuclear physics.

MSU benefits from the summer programs, as we are able to attract the best undergraduate students to NSCL who then come to MSU for graduate school. Currently about 25 percent of the graduate students at the lab had prior undergraduate research experience at NSCL. The MSU undergraduates involved in research at the lab during the semester also benefit from the experience as it gives them a competitive advantage to get into other top graduate programs in the country.

In my experience, from an experimentalist's viewpoint, if you show undergraduates what research is about, treat them as colleagues and make them feel welcome as part of the research community, and in particular, give them a chance to contribute. Many of them will naturally be drawn to advanced graduate work in a related field. Even if they do not pursue research any further, many can use the skills they gained while working in real research collaborations for use in industry.

Micheal Thoennessen  
Associate Director, National Superconducting  
Cyclotron Laboratory  
Professor, Physics and Astronomy

# Highlights of Undergraduate Literature

*MSU undergraduates publish and present their work in a wide range of scholarly venues. Below are summaries of their work.*

## Using Complement Coercion to Understand the Neural Basis of Semantic Composition: Evidence from an fMRI Study

Lisa Kelly worked with Dr. David C. Zhu and graduate student E. Matthew Husband to compare complement coercion sentences, which require an extra compositional operation to arrive at their meaning, to control sentences that do not. Using fMRI (functional MRI), the researchers found that complement coercion sentences activated the brain's Brodmann area forty-five times more than control sentences. Their results showed that complement coercion uses different regions of the brain than are used for other semantic violations, which suggests that these processes, while part of the language faculty, do not recruit the wider network of brain regions underlying semantic and syntactic violations.

Husband, E., Kelly, L., and Zhu, D., Using Complement Coercion to Understand the Neural Basis of Semantic Composition: Evidence from an fMRI Study, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 23 (11), 3254-3266, 2011.

## Conservative Treatment Modalities and Outcomes for Osteoarthritis: the Concomitant Pyramid of Treatment

Amira Saad worked as part of a research group to review current algorithms for the treatment of hip and knee osteoarthritis. The group compared the efficacy of the treatment options available to treat pain and restore function to the affected joint. After conducting an extensive literature review to determine combinations of appropriate therapy options, the group concluded that the ideal approach to decrease pain and improve joint function in the osteoarthritic hip and knee is an early transition to multimodal and concomitant therapy.

Langworthy, M., Saad A., and Langworthy N., Conservative Treatment Modalities and Outcomes for Osteoarthritis: the Concomitant Pyramid of Treatment, *Physician and Sportsmedicine* 38 (2):133-145, 2010.

## Effect of Movement on the Metrical Interpretation of Ambiguous Rhythms: Phillips-Silver and Trainor (2007) Revisited

Karli Nave worked as a member of a research team that revisited and failed to replicate the results of a previous study (Phillips-Silver and Trainor 2007) examining the effects of moving the body in sync with a metrically ambiguous rhythm on subjects' encoding of rhythm. The group performed a series of experiments and failed to replicate the previously reported effect of metrical movement on rhythm processing, leading it to question the reliability of the prior study and explore reasons for the failed replication.

McAuley, J., Henry, M., Rajarajan, P., and Nave, K., Effect of Movement on the Metrical Interpretation of Ambiguous Rhythms: Phillips-Silver and Trainor (2007), Society for Music Perception & Cognition, Rochester, NY, 13 August 2011.

## Investigating the Extraction of Diesel Fuel from Water for Fuel Spill Remediation

Johanna Smeekens worked with Dr. Ruth Waddell Smith and John McIlroy to investigate the efficiency of dichloromethane in extracting diesel fuel from water. Univariate and multivariate calibration procedures were performed to calculate the concentration of aliphatic and aromatic compounds present in diesel samples extracted from water. There was no evidence of preferential extraction of either compound class. Low percent error and standard deviations in these calculations indicated that the extraction was accurate and precise and thus can be used to monitor petroleum spill remediation.

Smeekens, J., McIlroy, J., and Waddell Smith, R., Investigating the Extraction of Diesel Fuel from Water for Fuel Spill Remediation, The Pittsburgh Conference on Analytical Chemistry and Applied Spectroscopy, Inc., Orlando, FL, 13 March 2012.

*More Highlights of Undergraduate Literature can be found on pages 7 and 45*

# One Book, One Community

Craig Pearson | Biochemistry and English

Last fall, the city of East Lansing and Michigan State University celebrated the tenth anniversary of the “One Book, One Community” program. Introduced in 2002 to provide an opportunity for East Lansing residents and MSU students to share in a common annual reading experience, the program selected for 2011 Jonathan Safran Foer’s bestselling novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, which follows the humorous and poignant journey of a boy whose father died in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

Foer, a 1999 Princeton University graduate, published his first novel *Everything Is Illuminated* in 2002 to critical acclaim. He published *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* in 2005, and a film version arrived in theaters last December. For the culmination of the “One Book, One Community” program in September 2011, Foer appeared at MSU’s Wharton Center to speak about his novel and welcome the freshman class, all of whom had read the book before coming to campus.

During his visit, Honors College students David Mitchell Clauson and Ian Page, along with Honors College Associate Dean and “One Book, One Community” committee member Dr. Melissa Baumann, conducted an interview with Foer. Clauson and Page had performed in a series of staged readings from the novel as part of a “One Book, One Community” event sponsored by the Department of Theatre, and as an honors option, sat down with Foer to discuss his work, his inspiration, and the transition from book to screen.

**DMC:** Since we’re at a university, we were wondering, how would you describe your experience in college overall, and how do you think that [your] choice of [a philosophy] major has affected your career and your writing?

**JSF:** How did it affect my career? Probably not

much at all. Nothing really affects your writing career except for your writing. In terms of the writing itself, maybe it’s inflected by some of the philosophy that I studied, but—just between us and whoever else is going to read this—I wasn’t the best philosophy student. At a certain point, I realized that I wanted to be a writer, that I wanted to invest myself in that, so the philosophy probably suffered. I went to Princeton, which was not the most obvious choice for me. I come from a certain kind of family and milieu, which is Jewish, urban, fast-talking. And Princeton is none of those things. [laughter] I happened to have a great experience there, maybe because it was so unlike where I came from. There are certain schools I could have gone to where I would have been like a lot of other people, and maybe that would have given me more comfort, but the point of school isn’t comfort. In certain ways it’s a kind of productive discomfort.

**IP:** You stated in other interviews that what sets you apart from writers like Jonathan Franzen is that you come from a generation that was raised on the Internet. Where in your writing do you see the influence of the Internet, or Internet remix culture?

**JSF:** There are certain questions that readers have better answers to than writers. There’s this idea that a writer means to do everything that he or she does, or understands everything that he or she does, when for me at least, it’s a much more intuitive process. It’s not that I thought, “I grew up in this—with the Internet, with media having a certain role in my life, and so how can I reflect that in the book?” I could have done that, but it would have felt really transparent and bad. Instead, if you don’t worry about how you sound or how it will come off or if it’s smart



L to R: Jonathan Safran Foer, Ian Page and David Mitchell Clauson

or stupid or funny, you can get what is at least an authentic representation of yourself. And I think that any authentic representation of somebody in his thirties, but even [more now somebody in his] twenties, would have something to do with the role of media in our lives. The amount of information we get is much greater, but it comes in very small packages. Maybe that was beginning to be reflected in *Extremely Loud*, just in the way that [the story] moved between voices or styles. That was not the reason the book did those things. It was not intentionally trying to say something. But often you say something most strongly when you're not trying to.

**DMC:** You mentioned that your writing process was “intuitive,” and in other interviews you've described it as “explosive.” What does this mean? Do you avoid outlining the plots of your novels? How much of your writing process is improvisation?

**JSF:** I think that you have to define your terms. What is writing and what is editing? They're very different things. It's almost like comparing your dream life with your waking life. What I write the first time I have no plan [for,] and it's pure improvisation. Obviously, once you've written a sentence, the second sentence can't help but know that the first sentence was written, and so you start to become familiar with what you're doing and your options become narrowed. But when I'm first writing something, it's “Does it feel right or does it feel wrong?” That kind of writing is very inefficient, because nobody's first thoughts are their best thoughts. Sometimes it can lead you to a good place, but I end up wasting a lot of time and paper. And after a certain point, I have something that I like, and I start editing, which is totally different. That does become more rigorous and deliberate, trying to make use of the things that are good and get rid of the things that are bad, and I become much more like a reader of what I've written.

**MB:** I can't help but ask—do you write on paper?

**JSF:** Actually, I write the first draft on the computer, and then after that I do everything by hand. I have a hard time composing for the first time on paper, but whenever I edit I always do it by hand. Otherwise you lose the physicality of it somehow.

**IP:** Speaking of physicality, you use a lot of experiments in bookmaking in your books [e.g., the flip book at the end of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*]. What sort of relationship do you see between yourself and writers like Kenneth Patchen, who uses poetry and images together, or graphic novelists, because there's a lot

of that [influence], especially in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*?

**JSF:** I try to write books as I think they should be—not as I think others should write them, not as I think all books should be. Books don't need visual experimentation, but that might be one good way of doing a specific story. I can tell you that I've never done anything for the sake of experimenting. I've only done it because it struck me as the right way to do it. Also, I think I probably came to writing through the backdoor. I didn't grow up wanting to be a writer. I didn't grow up as a huge reader, even. And I didn't really take writing seriously until I was in college. One of the great things about that is [that] I didn't have a longstanding reverence for novels. And so if I thought, “Wouldn't it be nice if there was a picture here?” I didn't become neurotic about “Oh, but do pictures belong in novels?” We've drawn these lines so sharply between novelist and poet and visual artist that it's done a disservice to people. People aren't novelists or poets or graphic novelists any more than they are philosophers or musicians. Everybody has a little bit of all of this, and it turns out that our skills lead us towards one thing or life leads us towards one thing, but it doesn't mean that we need to close ourselves off to everything else. The most important thing is just to be open, and part of being open for me is not saying no when I have an instinct to make a book look a certain way or sound a certain way.

**DMC:** *Everything Is Illuminated* actually started out as your thesis for Princeton; you were researching your own family history, and then [the research] evolved into this novel. Was there a point at which it went from specific factual research to fiction? What was your process of going from family history to this novel called *Everything Is Illuminated*?

**JSF:** It wasn't very deep research. The entirety of it was this trip to the Ukraine that I made, which only lasted three days. I didn't go through books or research, really. I think what I wanted was the experience of going. And probably even at the time I had some sense that I was going for that experience—for writing. I didn't know that it would be fiction, but I did start writing my book pretty much immediately after that trip. It's maybe a nice story, to say—maybe I've even told this story—that I just wanted to find out about my family and that I was just so moved by it and ended up wanting to write about it but [that there were so many gaps] that I had to fill in with fiction. But the truth is

that I think I was at a point in my life when I wanted to have a big experience, and as it turned out, the experience wasn't just going to the Ukraine; it was the experience of expressing it through writing. I guess what I'm saying is that a part of me kind of knew that I was going to write about it, even when I went.

**IP:** In the past, you've cited Kafka as an influence [on you, and he] is a very adult-oriented writer. However, a lot of your books deal with children. Who were some of your favorite writers as a child, and have any of those filtered into your [creation] of these characters?

**JSF:** I'm sure they have, but probably not more than anybody else's. When I think of my childhood reading—first of all, I can remember very little of it. But I remember my dad reading me *The Phantom Tollbooth*, and that was a big experience. Not really because of *The Phantom Tollbooth*, [but] just because we ritualized it and made it a father-son thing. But I pay much more attention to the books I read my kids than the books that I was read. I mean, I really don't have much memory of them at all. In terms of writing about kids, [*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*] obviously does. I don't think of my first book as being about younger people more than adults; it was about people in their twenties, maybe—the hero, Alex. I think that probably just reflects where I was in life when I wrote the books. The things I'm writing now aren't like that. So we'll see. It's hard when you've only written a couple books because the connections seem more important than they actually are. It's like if you flipped a coin twice, and they were both heads, you'd say, "Wow, how'd I flip so many heads?" [laughter] And I hope that as I write more, it will represent more of life.

**DMC:** In what ways do you perceive reading and writing as an intergenerational experience? How do you see books and the written word having that power to span generations?

**JSF:** Well, if they can't, they're not good books. That's true even of *Where the Wild Things Are*. You know, books should appeal to the deep things within us that come before age and race and gender and socioeconom-



*Photographs by Aleece Sisson*

ic background, so, in a way, the most ambitious books are the ones that strive to be the most open to readers. That's not the same as saying [that] *Harry Potter* is the most ambitious book because it reached the most people. You can reach people on different levels. It could be [that] a book that reaches very few people is extremely ambitious, if the nature of the marketplace means it's not going to find a big audience. One of the pleasures of doing these "One Book, One Community" programs is that you get to interact with a pretty diverse audience and, you know, see and hear a bit of how these connections are made. And, you know, unexpected connections.

**IP:** You have the adaptation of *Everything Is Illuminated* that came out in 2005; you've got [the movie version of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*], which is coming out in the next year. What is your relationship with your adaptors like? How does that process happen?

**JSF:** Almost no relationship. With [*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*], I've been somewhat more involved, but not that involved. I didn't write the screenplay or anything like that. So, it's been pretty removed for me. I feel like it's time to move on and do the next thing.

**IP:** Do you worry about any of your literary trademarks losing something in that transfer of medium?

**JSF:** No, not at all. What's the worst that happens if it does? It's just a movie. I don't feel like people will suddenly misunderstand something that they had to

understand. I see it like a parallel creation. They don't intersect. When you think about your book being made into a movie, what's the best-case scenario? It's a good movie, and it will bring a lot of readers to your book. The worst-case scenario is that it's a bad movie and it doesn't bring a lot of readers to your book. But it's not like a bad movie goes into your book with a pen and rewrites it, or screws it up. And it's not like people start returning your book. So really only good things can happen.

**DMC:** Where do you see yourself going next? Do you see yourself going back to more traditional forms or continuing to experiment?

**JSF:** I really don't know.

**MB:** Does that bother you?

**JSF:** Not knowing? If I really didn't know it would bother me, I'm just saying I don't know. [laughter] I almost never talk about it, for two reasons. One: things change so quickly that I don't believe any answer I give, and there's no reason to believe it. And two: there's something about talking about it that takes a little bit of the life out of making it. I was reading about this school in the New York Times Magazine last week. They had a really strange sexual harassment policy: if you were making out with somebody, you had to say, "Would it be okay if I kissed you now," and every time you were going to do something else, you had to ask it, and asking it—kills it. Similarly, talking about something that you're making kind of kills it.

**MB:** Did I hear correctly in that [earlier] you were almost comparing your books to how an artist thinks about interpreting their paintings or a poet their poetry? You're okay with people being open to the interpretation of what you've written?

**JSF:** More than okay with it; I like it. It doesn't matter what you mean when you're a writer; it matters how [people] understand it. I like hearing different understandings. I don't agree with all of them, but I don't see any problem with that.

**MB:** Do you have a sample of where you think you got it "just right"?

**JSF:** I wouldn't remember in [Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close], actually, [because] I haven't read it since it was published. I just don't reread things that I write. There's a funny little line where Oskar says—and it's not deep or beautiful—but when he says, "There are

more people alive now than have died in all of human history, so that if everyone wanted to play Hamlet at once they couldn't, because there aren't enough skulls." I liked that. I remember thinking, "That's a real Oskarism." I didn't think it was a real "Jonathan-ism." It's true. 🍷

### **More Highlights of Undergraduate Literature**

#### **Decreased Protein Expression and Activity of Transglutaminases 1 and 2 in Arteries from DOCA-salt Rats**

**Humphrey Petersen-Jones** worked with a team that studied the expression of transglutaminases (TGs) in hypertensive versus normotensive vasculature. With methods including immunohistochemistry, Western blot analysis, and in situ fluorescent detection of active TGs, it found decreased TG expression in hypertensive rat aortas as compared to a normotensive control. This data supports the idea that lack of compensatory TGs may play a role in the pathology of hypertension.

Petersen-Jones, H., Johnson, K., Thompson, J., Watts, S. Decreased protein expression and activity of transglutaminases 1 and 2 in arteries from DOCA-salt rats, American Physiological Society Abstract, 2012.

#### **Etanercept Improves Endothelial Function of Contralateral Middle Cerebral Artery After Cerebral Ischemia in Hypertensive Rats**

**Saavia Girgla** worked as a member of a team that hypothesized that contralateral middle cerebral artery (CL MCA) dilation is impaired after cerebral ischemia, and that inhibition of a proinflammatory marker will improve it in stroke-prone spontaneously hypertensive rats. The team showed that this inhibition improves CL MCA endothelial function and has the potential of improving post-MCA occlusion cerebral blood flow in hypertensive rats. This increase in blood flow could potentially lead to improving prognosis after stroke.

Girgla, S., Pires, P., McClain, J., and Dorrance, A., Etanercept Improves Endothelial Function of Contralateral Middle Cerebral Artery after Cerebral Ischemia in Hypertensive Rats, Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, 2012.

# Walking Backwards

Craig Pearson | Biochemistry and English

When Greg called, the whole thing seemed to Truman like a typical false alarm. Jess had marked her due date on the calendar like a Mayan apocalypticist, and the night before she'd stayed up counting the minutes and drinking club soda like it was New Year's. Only when her body failed to wrench into contractions at midnight had she let Greg coax her into bed. Four hours later, they were driving to the hospital.

"It's probably just stress from all this anticipation," Greg told Truman, who'd woken up to the cell phone buzzing on the floor next to his bed. "But we might be here a while, so can you stop by our place and make sure the dog gets out?"

Truman threw a change of clothes in the passenger seat of his car, just in case Jess actually delivered and he needed to stay overnight. It wasn't too far a leap to imagine that his sister might have triggered her biological clock through sheer willpower; she was the type of person who could glare at the sky and forestall rain.

They'd grown up with five years between them, which Jess used to signify by splaying her fingers and then clenching them in a fist, holding her hand a few inches from his face. "This is why I'm the warrior woman and you're the pony," she'd tell him, wearing a feather she'd found in the backyard. And when they played alpine rescue in the park, she would loop the sled string around his waist, say "You be the Saint Bernard," and thrust their satchel of snacks over his shoulder before she and her friends ran off to bury each other in the snow. With time they outgrew the games, but Jess never loosened her grip on the authority enclosed in that handful of years.

In their flurried departure, Greg hadn't thought to leave the parking pass behind, so Truman had to find a space at a meter in front of the specialty boutique next door. Jess and her husband owned a high-rise apartment in one of the more upscale Chicago neighborhoods, a far cry from the imaginary plains roamed and ravaged by her childhood warrior woman. The building had a classic exterior, lined with skinny trees that had just begun to shed their leaves on the sidewalk. The street was still bundled in a predawn

hush, but some of the windows above already burned yellow in the darkness.

Greg had called the lobby from the hospital, and Truman picked up a temporary key from the night receptionist before going up the back elevator. Jess had invited him for dinner almost immediately after he moved into his new apartment for a summer internship at the mayor's office downtown, and since then she'd made a point of taking him out to all her favorite restaurants and acquainting him with the neighborhood. During the past week, he'd come over a few times to help move furniture for an eleventh-hour baby-proofing, which had mainly consisted of stockpiling any remaining hazards in the master bedroom.

Jess and Greg lived in a 1,500-square-foot two-bedroom, right across from the elevator. Truman scratched at his scalp as he nudged the key into the lock; he hadn't had a chance to shower before heading over. Inside, he slipped off his sneakers and hung his windbreaker in the closet next to several of Greg's work blazers.

Directly opposite the front door, mounted on a block of stained wood against the wall, was what Jess liked to call her "statement piece"—a bronze statue of a bare-chested Native American straddling the back of a reared horse. The sculpture was a feat of balance. It stood entirely on the horse's back hoofs, and the rider, grasping a fistful of mane with one hand and raising the other behind him in a fearsome pose, looked permanently on the verge of being thrown to the ground. When Truman had asked her if she was afraid it might get knocked over, Jess frowned at him and pushed the statue gently with her fingertips. "Oh, you can make it tip a little, but it always comes back to the center," she said. "It's like the spirit of the hunter: unshakable." A few minutes later, when he was helping Greg in the bedroom, he'd overheard her making a call to have the statue affixed to its wooden base.

Tagg was curled up next to the air vent when Truman padded into the living room. The dog stretched with a yawn, and Truman squatted down to scratch him behind the ears, looking out the window at the lights that were beginning to flicker on in distant buildings.

“Do you need to go outside?” Truman asked, but the dog stayed on the floor, looking up at him silently. He checked his watch. It was only five thirty. “All right, just let me know if you need anything.”

Truman went into the master bedroom, which was still filled with the results of their last round of child-proofing—scattered disorderedly on the carpet as if it was only going to be a week or two before the items could be restored to their usual places. A glass floor lamp lay unplugged at the foot of the bed next to a line of bristling wolf sculptures and other sharp-edged and delicate ornaments. Extra plastic outlet covers were stacked on the dresser, and a pair of disassembled baby gates leaned against the wall. Truman was careful not to step on anything as he made his way into the bathroom and dropped his overnight bag on the tile floor.

He took a groggy shower and put his glasses on, feeling like he was already back at school waking up early to write a paper. When he returned to the living room, Tagg was sitting by the door. “Sorry, buddy,” he said, rummaging through the front closet for the leash. “Didn’t think I took that long.”

It was strange standing in an elevator with a husky. Truman had always pictured them as sled dogs, bounding over snow banks and pulling people behind them like Jess would make him do in alpine rescue—not, as this one was now, waiting patiently to descend to the first floor and walk out into the private back courtyard for the relief of fresh air and damp grass. As Tagg sniffed in circles under a molting tree, Truman wondered if this was a dog-friendly building or if Greg and Jess had needed to flex some of their connections to earn an exception.

Before he was born, Truman’s parents had bought a puppy for Jess. He remembered the stories. Their parents, who knew neighbors that had gone back and forth with the management about keeping pets in their apartment, had registered to train the dog through the Seeing Eye school. After they got the permit, they dropped out of the program.

What he didn’t remember was the puppy itself, but that was his own fault. Apparently, when he was eight months old, he’d been sitting on his mother’s lap while the family was watching television, and as the dog wandered past, Truman had grabbed it around the neck, opened his mouth, and bit its ear. The dog, in a split second of retaliation, swung back

and nipped him in the cheek. Accounts differed with regard to whether or not blood was drawn; all Truman knew was that there wasn’t a scar. The next day, despite an eruption of tears from Jess that left behind a headache they’d had to subdue with aspirin, his parents had given the dog to the local shelter.

It was impossible, of course, that he would have any memory of this event, but Truman still found himself trying to recreate it in his mind. What strange impulse had made him want to bite a dog in the ear? Had he cried when he got bitten back, and was that bite the manifestation of some untamable instinct or just a puppy’s natural play fighting? He had asked once, when Jess was in high school, if she remembered. “Don’t talk to me about that,” she’d said, turning up the volume on the car stereo. “That ruined my childhood.”

In eighth grade, Truman had written a research paper on canine behavior. Looking back on the hazy details he’d collected over the years, he came to the conclusion that the snap probably wasn’t motivated by aggression. And this made him angry at his parents, because it wasn’t fair that they’d acted so quickly in getting rid of this dog, as if it were nothing more than a sharp object they’d forgotten to remove from the apartment.

Greg called around seven o’clock to let him know that Jess had officially gone into labor. “I guess this is it,” he said, in a voice that made Truman think of someone about to go bungee jumping. “I’ll keep you posted.”

Truman cracked a couple of eggs and made a plain omelet as Tagg lay under the table in the kitchen. Greg had offered him full access to the refrigerator and pantry and made sure he knew where the dog food was—under the counter in a sealed bag that looked like it had been picked up at a high-end farmer’s market rather than a pet store. He’d rummaged around in search of peppers or onions, but apparently this was the sort of thing Jess only bought when she had a recipe planned; either that, or they’d been going out a lot lately, even on the nights when Truman wasn’t tagging along. He knew his sister was a devoted connoisseur of the restaurant scene, and he tried to picture her taking a newborn to Fogo de Chão or One Sixtyblue.

It had been Jess who found him the apartment downtown. As soon as she heard about the internship, she got Greg, who was a partner in an urban architectural

firm, to press some contacts from recent residential projects. There was a building that had just opened, and Truman got a brand-new studio apartment with a great summer lease.

“Who knows?” Jess told him after delivering the news over the phone. “Maybe the mayor will hire you as a full-time assistant, and you can just stay here.”

“I think they’d prefer I get my degree first,” Truman said. He’d started out as an animal science major and switched to social relations and policy after his freshman year. Jess had always been the smarter one, but nonetheless he’d managed to win a major scholarship to a small liberal arts school. For years, they’d only seen each other at the occasional Thanksgiving or Christmas gathering. Their parents lived in different states. Now that he was practically just down the street, Jess’s interest in her brother had sparked a new flame.

Truman rinsed his plate in the sink and filled Tagg’s water bowl. When the dog tried to follow him into the master bedroom, he had to push him back by the forehead.

“Sorry, but you might break something,” he said, closing the door. He took a few minutes to organize the small gallery of dangerous artwork, picking items up from the floor and arranging them carefully in the corner. When he was finished, he penned them in with the baby gates, brushing off his hands and surveying his small tribe of statues and figurines.

It was something he’d always been good at—organizing things and seeing tasks through. He knew how to take orders and execute them efficiently. “Dependable” was the word his high school volleyball coach had used, and he’d won the loyalty award in his senior year. At the mayor’s office, Truman kept careful track of schedules and carried a pen and notepad in the pocket of his suit coat at all times. The other day, when he’d grabbed the wrong jacket from the closet, he had run three blocks to a convenience store and made it back with fresh materials, panting, less than sixty seconds away from being late.

He’d been lucky that today was a Saturday; he wouldn’t have wanted to call in and take a day off. But now that he had all this time to himself—Jess and Greg wouldn’t be back until at least tomorrow afternoon—Truman wasn’t sure what to do with it. There was no agenda, no list of assignments to complete.

The only command he’d been given was to make sure the dog got out.

On their next descent, he took Tagg through the lobby and entered the bustling tide going by in front of the building. He dropped a few more coins into the meter and wrapped the leash double around his fist. He recognized several of the shops and restaurants he’d walked to with Jess, including the baker’s she used to visit every morning before the pregnancy made her start watching calories. She’d treated him to its special double chocolate muffin and had given him a loaf of cinnamon bread to take home. Prior to this summer, Truman couldn’t remember the last time she’d bought him anything; their family had agreed to stop sending each other Christmas gifts after Truman went to college, because half the time they ended up returning the things anyway. When they were younger, she wouldn’t even let him borrow money.

“You don’t see this part of the world much, do you?” he said to Tagg, turning around to walk backward as the leash tugged behind him. The husky was snuffling audibly, his snout darting like a butterfly between landlocked trees and discarded food wrappers that scuttled across the pavement in the wind. With the leash strung between them, Truman took measured steps and stared down the street, where a series of diminishing traffic lights flickered into the distance. If his eyes were sharp enough, he realized, he should be able to see the window of his apartment from where they were standing. He was pretty sure it faced this way, high up in one of the downtown skyscrapers—within walking distance if he’d been ambitious, although at their pace it would take him and the dog half the day to get there.

He turned around again as they drew near Jess and Greg’s building on the way back, tripping over the leash in the process. “My bad,” he said, touching the fur on Tagg’s back reflexively. The dog looked up at him, and Truman was struck by the icy blue in his eyes. It was the first time he’d seen them in the sunlight. Do all huskies have blue eyes? he wondered, trying to remember what he’d studied about recessive alleles before flexible group dynamics had out-muscled hard science for position in his schedule. As he thought about this, standing next to the dog while they ascended in the back elevator, it struck him that he’d never learned what breed the puppy was that Jess had been forced, because of him, to give up. It was a detail no one had ever discussed. He briefly

considered bringing it up when his sister came home the next day, but as he stepped into her apartment and met the fierce gaze and upraised arm of the native warrior sculpture, he realized he was still afraid to ask.

Jess gave birth at 11:56 p.m., hanging onto her due date by the skin of her teeth. Truman could already hear his sister answering her friends when they asked about the pregnancy: “It went like clockwork. Delivered right on schedule.” Greg brought her back in the next evening, just as Truman was having dinner. He’d had to order takeout; the supplies they’d left hadn’t even lasted two days.

Truman followed Jess as she retreated to the bedroom. “Somebody’s been busy,” she said, holding the baby in her arms and looking at the corral he’d erected in the corner. “You must have been really bored.”

“I had some good bonding time with Tagg,” Truman said, squeezing the dog’s head against his leg. “It was a pretty relaxed weekend.”

“I’m glad you two got along,” Jess said, swaying back and forth at the hips meditatively.

The next day was Monday, and Jess told Truman to stop by after work. Some of her friends had pitched in to bring her dinners for a few days, and she anticipated that they’d have too much food. She imagined he was sick of going out by now, anyway.

He passed the statue on his way in and found Jess and Greg already sitting down in the kitchen. Between them, slabs of beer-brined pork chops lay amid orange slices on a bed of lettuce. After they all finished eating, Jess got up and uncorked a bottle of wine. “I’ve been waiting nine months for this,” she said with a laugh, pouring herself an inch.

Later, Greg took the baby to watch the news with him on the couch while Truman helped Jess wrap figurines in tissue paper. “I really appreciate you doing this,” she said, sitting cross-legged on the master bedroom carpet. Tagg was curled up in the corner by the door. “It’s been nice having you around to help out lately.”

She spoke into her lap, and Truman waited for her to set aside the small statue in her hands before handing her the next one.

“There are some things that still worry me, though.” She pushed her hair back from her forehead and glanced over at him, speaking as if the idea had just descended on her: “Do you remember when my puppy bit you?”

Truman hesitated. It was a strange question to ask, not only because he’d been thinking about it himself, but also because they both knew the answer. There were a lot of things he did remember: the way she used to look at him sometimes when he asked their parents if they could have a pet, and her sour smile when they told him he wasn’t old enough. He remembered playing the pony and the Saint Bernard. The shadow of that split-second snap was long, but the event itself was lodged permanently in the darkness above his memory.

“How could I remember?” he said. “I wasn’t even a year old.”

“We can’t leave the door open for something like that to happen, or worse,” Jess went on. “Greg and I have been talking about giving the dog away.”

Truman looked over his shoulder at Tagg, whose presence in the room seemed suddenly awkward. The husky’s ears had perked up when Truman turned around, and he wondered if the dog could sense anything from the tone of the conversation—like how he used to hear their parents’ voices at night through the vent in his bedroom, their words stretched and compressed beyond understanding.

“That’d be too bad,” he said, his eyes falling to the depleted tribe of statues. “We’d never see him again.”

“What if you take him?” She was winding the electrical cord of the glass floor lamp in loops around her fist. “You know, keep him in the family. Then we could come visit, and maybe in a few years, when we’re ready, we could take him back.”

For a moment, Truman let the scene play out in his imagination: Greg and Jess signing papers to transfer the registration, Tagg poking his head out from the passenger side of the car as they drove home, his sister stopping by with the baby to criticize the dog food brand Truman was buying. “But I couldn’t,” he said. “I mean, I love this guy, but I still have another year of school left. And then I’ll be looking for a job. I can’t take care of a dog. How would I even get him approved for my apartment—pretend I’m blind?”

“It’s animal friendly,” Jess said. “I checked.”

“I’m talking about when I go back to school. My lease here ends in two weeks.”

“So the mayor didn’t hire you for full time.” She said this flatly, as if it were a disappointment she’d been expecting. Jess laid another parcel in the long wicker basket where she had been placing all the wrapped items; Truman looked at it and thought of their old wooden sled. “It’s fine,” Jess said. “You don’t have to take him if you don’t want to. I just thought I’d ask before I called the shelter.”

Over her shoulder, Truman could see the glow of nighttime traffic radiating up between the buildings outside. “Is that it?” he said. “You’re just going to get rid of him?”

Jess shrugged. “If you don’t want him.”

If you don’t want him. In some incredible feat of balance, Jess had yet again shifted a burden from her shoulders onto his. This was why she’d arranged the lease for him downtown, why she’d been so excited to hear about his internship. It explained the dinner invitations, the restaurants, the double chocolate muffin at the baker’s. She wasn’t making up for lost time. She just wanted to prop him up to cushion her blow, to have him carry a share of the blame so she wouldn’t have to shoulder it herself.

Truman stood up and walked to the window. The distance that lay between them had been lit up at last, and it was farther than he’d thought. Even if he took the dog, even if he traveled the road between their apartments a hundred times and did whatever Jess wanted, this was ground that couldn’t be made up. It was worse than if they had lived in different states. They were like divorced siblings.

As he looked outside, he wished he could walk backward into the darkness of his childhood and stop their parents from giving away that poor stupid puppy, because that was what had made them this way.

“What about your kid?” he said abruptly, turning around.

She glanced up at him. “What do you mean?”

“Your kid.”

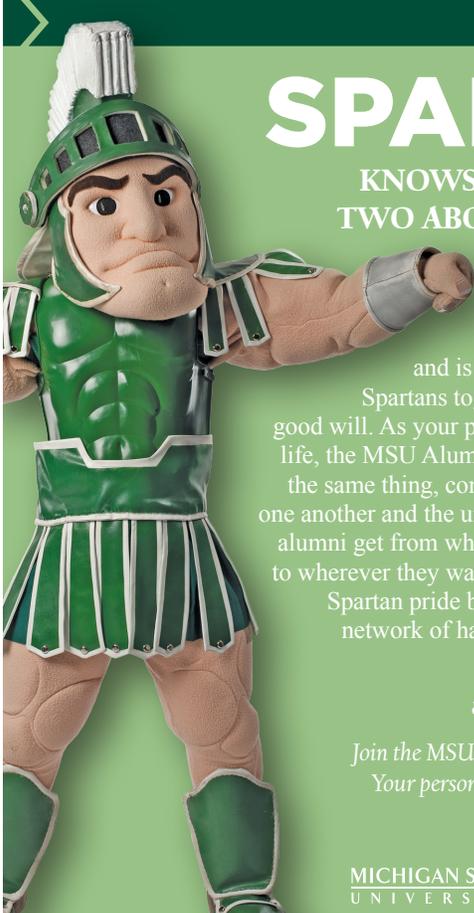
“What about him?”

“I would think he’d want somebody to grow up with,” Truman said, stepping over his sister and kneeling next to Tagg in the opposite corner. “I don’t think he’d want to find out you gave away a dog that could have been his. It might ruin his childhood.”

He realized he was speaking for himself now, but it didn’t matter.

“Do you even remember what breed it was,” he asked, “—the puppy you had when we were little? The one that bit me.”

Jess was watching him stroke the fur on Tagg’s back. “Of course I do,” she said, but that was all, and after Truman had waited for a minute or so, he got up and left the room. As he was putting his shoes on in the front hall, he looked at the statue of the warrior, its open hand raised behind it in the air, the fingers spread wide as if something had just dropped out of them. But Truman knew now. They had always been empty. ♡



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# Michigan State University's Involvement with the South Vietnamese Civil Guard

Milan Douglas Griffes | History

This paper examines the involvement of Michigan State University (MSU) in South Vietnam from 1954 to 1959. During this period, the university established the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group (MSUG). The MSUG worked closely with President Ngo Dinh Diem, shaping policy and providing advice and material aid to the South Vietnamese government.

This paper will focus on the MSUG's involvement in the restructuring of the South Vietnamese Civil Guard, the country's primary police agency.

The research draws exclusively from the MSUG collection of the University Archives & Historical Collections, housed in Conrad Hall.

In June of 1954, Ngo Dinh Diem accepted Emperor Bao Dai's invitation to serve as the premier of the State of Vietnam. The French had failed in their attempt to reassert colonial control of the country, having been recently defeated by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu. Bao Dai hoped Diem could serve as a premier capable of standing against communist domination without French backing. To the Emperor's annoyance, Diem soon began to act independently, consolidating power through a fraudulent election. By 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem had instituted himself as the President of a new South Vietnamese state, the Republic of Vietnam.

But Diem did not do it alone. He had been out of Vietnam since 1950, traveling in Japan, Europe, and America. He had made many friends and connections over the course of his journey. While in Japan, Diem met Wesley Fishel, a young American academic. Over the next decade, Diem and Fishel would become close friends, working together almost every day. In 1951, Fishel hired Diem as a consultant at the Governmental Research Bureau of Michigan State University, where Fishel had recently become a professor of political science. While working at the Bureau, Diem created an outline of South Vietnam's governmental needs.

This outline was divided into three sections: public administration, public finance, and police administration. It would soon become the foundation of MSU's Vietnam project.

When Diem assumed power in South Vietnam three years later, he looked to America for assistance and support. In the fall of 1954, the new president of South Vietnam requested an aid program from the United States and, specifically, MSU. The United States was happy to oblige him, as providing technical and military aid to free nations abroad was seen as an inexpensive alternative to fighting small-scale wars against communist insurgencies in those countries. As for MSU's involvement, a university being requested to establish an aid program abroad was not unusual in the 1950s; MSU was already acting in this capacity in Colombia, Brazil, and the Ryukyu Islands. However, MSU's undertaking in South Vietnam would become much larger and more involved than any of its previous projects.

In the fall of 1954, four MSU personnel traveled to South Vietnam to conduct a two-week survey of the country's needs. At the end of its time there, the team recommended that MSU establish a program to provide technical assistance to the country. A contract was then signed between MSU, the Government of South Vietnam (GVN), and the United States Operations Mission (USOM). By this contract, MSU was to provide assistance in three areas: in-service training, development of a public administration institute, and civil police training. The aid mission was to be known as the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, or MSUG.

The MSUG's involvement with the South Vietnamese civil police forces was one area in which the Group had the potential to make a large positive impact. However, the MSUG largely failed to meet its goals in the field of police administration. The Civil Guard issue

of 1955–1958 is an example of the MSUG’s failure to exert any meaningful influence over the decisions of President Ngo Dinh Diem with regard to the politico-military situation of South Vietnam. MSUG advisors persistently pushed President Diem to adopt their plan for South Vietnam’s police agencies, specifically regarding the Civil Guard. Diem repeatedly refused to do so, however, either by avoiding the issue or by simply ignoring the MSUG’s recommendations. The success of the MSUG in South Vietnam came from its role as a trainer and equipper of the police forces, not as an advisor to the presidency or an organizer of police agencies. Although it controlled a large amount of United States aid, the MSUG lacked the leverage to compel President Diem to listen to its opinions when those opinions ran contrary to his own.

When the first MSUG survey team arrived in South Vietnam in 1955, the country’s police forces were in a tangle. South Vietnam had inherited a multitude of police agencies from the French colonial government. The Sûreté, Gendarmerie, Civil Guard, and Municipal Police were all active and independently administered, and many of their functions overlapped. A thorough reorganization of the South Vietnamese police system was required.

On October 29, 1955, MSUG Chief Advisor Edward Weidner and his staff met with President Diem’s minister of the interior. The minister briefed the MSUG advisors on his expectations for the Group: The MSUG was to “work towards streamlining the civil police agencies from administration point of view [sic]” (Weidner 1955). This was to be done by “review[ing] agencies with a view to consolidating them if possible.” The representatives of the MSUG then presented their plan for the police administration of South Vietnam. The plan would eliminate all police organizations except for the Municipal Police, the Sûreté (renamed the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation, or VBI), and the Civil Guard. According to the plan, the Municipal Police would be in charge of civilian police duties in major cities, the VBI would function as a force of specialists analogous to the American Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Civil Guard would be the primary civilian police organization outside of major metropolitan areas. It is important to note that the MSUG planned for the Civil Guard to be organized as a civil rather than military police agency, controlled by a central office. The meeting between the MSUG and the Minister of the Interior concluded with a list of MSUG recom-

mendations for the GVN police organizations. MSUG advisors suggested that the Army assume control of security in areas of the country that were not fully pacified. These areas would return to civil administration when the situation had stabilized. The advisors also reiterated their suggestion that the Gendarmerie be disbanded immediately and that no new police agencies be formed. At the meeting’s conclusion, the two parties had agreed on a course of action.

According to internal MSUG memos, the MSUG “plan was submitted and approved by Vietnamese officials up to the president. They have implemented it and are working toward it as their ultimate goal. It has been the basic guide of the Vietnamese Government” (Weidner 1955). Weidner and his colleagues were confident that their plan was being embraced by the GVN, and they anticipated little disagreement on the subject.

Two weeks after their meeting with the minister of the interior, the MSUG advisors met with President Diem to discuss South Vietnam’s internal security. Weidner and Howard Hoyt, the director of police projects in Vietnam, were in attendance. One of the first items to be discussed was a function of the Philippine Civil Guard known as the complaint system. This system allowed the Philippine president to use the Civil Guard as a network of informants which functioned as his eyes and ears in the government. The Philippine Civil Guard reported emergency situations and illegal operations to the president, as well as informed him on the efficiency and political leanings of government employees. President Diem was interested in implementing a similar system in South Vietnam. The Civil Guard would function as a spy network and an internal police force that received orders directly from the president. Using the Guard in such a way would further secure Diem’s grasp on power.

According to the minutes of the meeting, the MSUG advisors had a very different idea about the function of the Civil Guard. With regards to the Philippine spy network, they “advised [Diem that] it would be impossible [to implement such a system] here with the present organization of the Civil Guard.” The GVN Civil Guard was “not responsible or loyal to the Central Federal Government. They are employed, paid, and equipped by the Province Chief . . . All their reports must go through the Province Chief” (Hoyt and Weidner 1955). The Civil Guard would have to

be reorganized and centrally controlled in order for it to function as an information network. The MSUG advised against transforming the Guard into a spy network because of strictly logistical considerations, but its advisors had their own plans for the organization.

The MSUG advisors then presented their plan for South Vietnam's internal security organization to Diem—the same plan that had been approved by the minister of interior two weeks earlier. At Diem's hands, the plan was to receive a much different reception. After listening to the proposal of the MSUG advisors, Diem outlined the situation as he saw it: GVN military units across the country were being withdrawn, with one battalion remaining in each province; antigovernment forces were becoming more active in the face of the military withdrawal; terrorist attacks instigated by communists and bandits were occurring across the country. On top of this, the annual rice crop was beginning to come in. Security in the countryside was necessary to ensure a successful harvest, which in turn was vital to the nation's people and economy.

In the face of this troubled situation, Diem's first priority was security. He saw the Civil Guard as a means of stabilizing South Vietnam. The Guard would function as a paramilitary organization, supporting the military against communist insurgency and banditry. The Guard would no longer be administered by the Ministry of the Interior; it would, instead, serve under the Ministry of Defense. This move would emphasize the military aspect of the organization rather than its civilian police function. Moreover, as an element of the Ministry of Defense, the Guard would be under the direct control of the presidency. This would give Diem a large reserve force with which to bolster his position. Diem did not, however, plan on keeping the Civil Guard under the minister of defense permanently; it would be restored to the minister of the interior after the situation had stabilized. The president further asserted that the members of the Guard would be better trained and equipped after serving alongside army battalions.

Weidner and his MSUG advisors were shocked by the president's proposal. Prior to this meeting, they had received every indication that their plan for the GVN police forces was on its way to implementation. The advisors quickly regrouped, stating that "we cannot agree with [Diem's] solution . . . The Civil

Guard should be under the Minister of the Interior. A transfer of the Guard to the Minister of Defense will not solve either weaknesses of the present Civil Guard organization or increase its liability to resist enemy forces" (Dorsey 1955). The MSUG remained firm in its beliefs on the issue and true to its plan, but the advisors found themselves unable to convince the president to reconsider. After what one MSUG memo dryly described as "4 hours and 28 cigarettes," the meeting between the MSUG and President Diem was coming to a close. Completely opposed to the policy outlined by Diem, Weidner gave his closing thoughts: "[I do] not think the [Civil Guard] could ever be an effective civilian police force if it is continually being sacrificed to meet momentary military needs. Finally, [I do] not see how MSU could fit into the picture painted by the President, as MSU is equipped to provide advice and assistance to civil but not military police organization" (Dorsey 1955). Weidner thought Diem was attempting to use the Guard to shore up his power in the short term, at the expense of the stability and longevity of the organization itself. The chief advisor closed with a subtle threat that if the MSUG's suggestions were not incorporated into Diem's plans, the Group would pull funding. For the time being, however, the issue remained unresolved.

Little discussion occurred between the MSUG and the office of the presidency regarding the position of the Civil Guard within the GVN for nearly a year. The Guard remained under attached to the Ministry of Defense, under the direction of the presidency, while it received training and equipment from the MSUG. Then, on November 20, 1956, came a meeting attended by Wesley Fishel, Howard Hoyt, and President Diem. To begin with, Fishel asked Hoyt to review "the progress being made with the different police services" (Hoyt 1956). The resulting overview sparked a heated discussion between Hoyt and Diem on the subject of the president's plan for the Civil Guard. This discussion showed Hoyt and the other MSUG advisors how little Diem valued their opinions when it came to matters of national security.

Hoyt began his review of the police services with the Municipal Police, complimenting the efficiency of the organization and its director. In his memo on the meeting, Hoyt writes:

"I, then, moved on to the Civil Guard, and advised [Diem] that we were very happy with the ability that the new Director General Tran

Tu Oai seems to display. I told him that we noticed a decided increase in their efficiency and morale. I pointed out that General Oai is a strong believer in training. The president interrupted to say that General Oai apparently had an erroneous idea as to what his Civil Guard was supposed to do—that he was operating it as a second Army. The President's idea seems to be that the Civil Guard, rather than being controlled from a central directorate, was to be controlled from province level by province chiefs" (Hoyt 1956).

A year earlier, Diem had asked MSUG advisors about the feasibility of using the Guard as an internal spy network. At that time, the Guard's lack of central organization made such a function impossible, yet Diem remained interested in the possibility, asking that the idea be studied further. Now, in 1956, Diem was adamant that the Guard should remain administered at the provincial level. Why such a complete reversal of position? Although his stance shifted, Diem's motive had remained constant. From the moment he assumed power, his first priority was always the security of his person and position. In 1955, Diem had hoped to use the Civil Guard to ferret out subversive elements of his fledgling government. As the GVN settled and grew more stable, the need for a personal spy network was reduced. However, the notion of the Guard administered by an able, independent director made Diem uneasy. By late 1956, Diem viewed a strong, centrally organized Guard as more of a threat than an asset. The president was not impressed by the "ability" of the Guard's new director general, nor by the increase of the "efficiency and morale" of the troops under his direction. To Diem, this General Oai was a rival for power, a man running a "second Army." It was better for the Civil Guard to be weakly administered at the provincial level, thus eliminating a potential threat.

None of this, however, was discussed at the November 1956 meeting. After describing the president's plan for provincial administration of the Guard, Hoyt continues in his memorandum:

"Since this is in direct conflict with the recommendations that we have made . . . and since it is in conflict with our verbal recommendations and statements made to government officials—all the way from the President on down, I was quite surprised to hear this state-

ment. To make sure I understood right, I gave a few hypothetical problems and asked how he felt they should be handled" (Hoyt 1956). Again, the MSUG was coming into conflict with Diem over the Civil Guard, this time not over to which ministry it belonged, but about whether it should be administered at a provincial or national level.

Hoyt began to question Diem about the nature of his proposed provincial Civil Guard. His memo continues:

"I asked if the province chief . . . was capable of determining how a police action should be carried out to solve a security problem that had developed . . . [Diem] felt the province chief could make such a decision and that it would be up to the province chiefs to direct the Civil Guard as to whatever action they should take . . . I, then, asked that if the Civil Guard were successful in apprehending the group that ambushed a government party the day before and killed 4 or 5 people, were the Civil Guard to go ahead and secure the statements from witnesses and prepare the case for court? He said 'no'—that they were to turn the case over to the military because, in this case, the bandits were members of one of the sects . . . He said in the case in question, the Gendarmerie would be called in to determine if they were just bandits or operating as sects. This, of course, would involve three separate policing organizations—the Civil Guard, making the apprehension; the Gendarmerie, determining what the criminal are; and the military, then proceeding with them, if they are from the sects" (Hoyt 1956).

With his hypotheticals, Hoyt had forced President Diem into outlining a convoluted and ineffective method of police work. An American analog of such a system would be as follows: A group of criminals captured by the state police would be turned over to the Central Intelligence Agency, who would investigate their case. The criminals would then be tried in the military court system. Clearly, Diem's first priority was not developing an efficient police system. He was willing to implement a slow, fragmented system if it ensured that the country's military remained loyal to his presidency.

At this point in the meeting, Hoyt was nearing a state of disbelief. After a few questions regarding the Sûreté and the possibility of a Central Records Bureau, he directed Diem's attention to the MSUG report on police administration that had been submitted to the GVN earlier in the year. By his account,

"I then pointed out to [Diem] that at his request last January we had prepared a rather lengthy and thorough report on our recommendations for the organization of all civil police agencies within Vietnam, spelling out definitely the responsibilities of each agency. I asked him if he approved of this report. He did not answer this question, but went on to another matter. A little later, I pointed out that at the request of his government [on] the first of July this year, we had prepared our recommendations on the reorganization of the Surete, and I asked for his reactions on that. He did not speak to this point either . . . I gathered that he either has not seen any of our reports, or that he has forgotten their contents. It also seemed apparent that he has forgotten all former verbal conversations we have had with him about our reorganization recommendations for the civil police" (Hoyt 1956).

Hoyt must have been furious at Diem's casual ignorance of the MSUG reports. A respected professor at MSU and former chief of the Kalamazoo police, Howard Hoyt was used to having his work taken seriously. He had spent the past year in Vietnam preparing this reorganization plan for the South Vietnamese police forces. For its existence to not even be acknowledged by Diem begs the question of what the MSUG's purpose was if its recommendations were not being taken into consideration by the GVN.

If considered from Diem's perspective, one can more easily see the sense underlying his odd behavior at this meeting. The GVN president was more than happy to have the MSUG advisors train his police forces and channel United States aid into his government. However, when it came to making new policy, Diem was reluctant to have foreign interests involved in the decision-making process. If the American advisors agreed with his decisions, their support could only help him. However, when the advisors disagreed with Diem's actions, he had no incentive to listen to their recommendations. The Civil Guard issue was one of the major disagreements between the MSUG

and the president. At the November 1956 meeting, when Hoyt began to directly question Diem about the MSUG reports, the president's easiest response was to simply brush off the questions and move on to a different topic. Hoyt may have been right in suspecting that Diem had not seen any of the MSUG reports. Hoyt's conjecture that Diem had forgotten all of their previous conversations is less likely (and more derisive), but the larger point remains: to Diem, the MSUG was welcome in South Vietnam as a training and aid organization, but not as an advisory body. Diem was determined to make his own decisions, with or without the support of his American advisors.

Clearly, a breakdown in communication had occurred regarding the MSUG's role in South Vietnam. Three months after the November 1956 conference, Wesley Fishel, who had assumed the position of chief advisor for the MSUG, arranged a meeting between Diem and nine senior members of the MSUG. The meeting's agenda covered a wide range of topics of topics, but its primary objective was to clarify the role of the Group. In his preliminary memo to the president, Fishel staged the questions:

"The Michigan State University Group now has professors assisting in the program of the National Institute of Administration, developing in-service training programs, counseling members of the Government as to [the] reorganization of their departments and of various governmental services, and assisting the police to reorganize and reform their organization, training, and procedures. In light of our limited staff and the many demands made upon us, how can we be of greatest service to your Government? Would you care to suggest certain areas which might be considered of higher priority than others?" (Fishel 1957).

It had been more than two years since the first MSUG team arrived in South Vietnam and conducted their hurried survey of the country's needs. The MSU professors now found themselves dealing with a wide array of issues, and many were questioning the effectiveness of the program as a whole. Fishel, in many ways the progenitor of the MSUG, now sought to clarify the project's objectives, or at least reconcile its internal agenda with that of the president. Diem's brusque behavior three months before had not been forgotten; the last item on the meeting's agenda was to discuss the "reorganization of civil law

enforcement agencies in the Republic of Vietnam including the delimitation of responsibilities of each agency” (Fishel 1957). Unfortunately, the author was unable to find any minutes of this meeting, so Diem’s responses to these issues will not be discussed here.

Nearly a year after the alarming meeting of November 1956, the MSUG would receive their answer. On November 2, 1957, the GVN published a proposed statute entitled “Organization of the Civil Guard.” The proposal was written by the GVN without any collaboration with the MSUG. Its appearance seems to have taken the MSUG advisors by surprise; there is no evidence that they were aware of the document before its publication, or were consulted at all during its creation. This is surprising because the MSUG had devoted a considerable amount of time to developing its plan for the Civil Guard since it was requested to do so in 1955. Although caught off guard by the statute’s emergence, the MSUG wasted no time with their response. On November 7, 1957, Hoyt sent a memo to Fishel, who then forwarded it to various GVN representatives and the United States ambassador to South Vietnam. This lengthy document took the Civil Guard Statute section by section, interspersed with criticisms after each point.

The statute began, “The Government of Vietnam conceives the Civil Guard as a national force destined to assure the maintenance and re-establishment of order on all of the territory of the Republic and to supervise the application of laws and regulations” (Hoyt 1957). Hoyt wasted no time in tearing apart this seemingly innocuous opening, writing: “Is the Civil Guard to be a national civil or national military force? With which ‘laws and regulations’ is the Civil Guard to be concerned?” (Hoyt 1957). Immediately, Hoyt raised the question that the GVN was so happy to keep cloaked in ambiguity: Was the Civil Guard a civilian police or a paramilitary support force? As seen previously, Diem preferred to keep the definition of the Guard flexible, permitting him to use the force to suit his needs of the moment. The MSUG had consistently pushed for the Civil Guard to become a well-defined civil police force, yet now here was proposed legislation which again left the issue equivocal.

The statute continued, stating that “the Civil Guard will be attached to the Minister of National Defense and placed at the disposal of the Minister of Interior for missions regarding security. It will also lend its services to other Ministries” (Fishel 1957). MSUG

advisors had extensively discussed this issue with Diem. As it had been conceived by the MSUG as a civil police force, the Civil Guard according to their plan had naturally fallen under the Ministry of the Interior. Diem had previously announced that he planned to place the Guard in the Ministry of Defense, and so here it appeared in legislation, regardless of MSUG recommendations. Permitting the Guard to be utilized by the Minister of Interior was perhaps a concession to the MSUG but can be more convincingly construed as a product of Diem’s penchant for ambiguity.

The GVN proposal then turned to the logistical concerns of the Guard: “The Department of National Defense will assure the logistical support of the Civil Guard: the furnishing of basic material, equipment, armament, and uniforms; the replacement of these materials; repair; the supplying of ammunition, gasoline, etc.” (Fishel 1957). Such an arrangement would closely link the Guard to the army (the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, or ARVN). Hoyt, still pushing for a civilian Civil Guard, did not like this at all. His criticisms were as follows:

“Why is the supply function given to the Army? Why could not the Civil Guard develop its own supply and maintenance organization under its own supervision? . . . Can GVN assure the Civil Guard that its requests for logistical support and service will be given equal priority with those of ARVN? . . . Since its inception two and a half years ago, the Civil Guard has been logistically dependent upon ARVN. This situation has not been satisfactory” (Fishel 1957).

The MSUG advisors could not imagine the Civil Guard functioning as a healthy, independent organization if attached to the army and the Ministry of Defense. The current situation supported their position, yet the GVN was prepared to finalize such an arrangement regardless. When the statute stated, “[The Civil Guard] is entirely distinct from that of the Sureté and the [Municipal] Police,” Hoyt wondered, “Will the Civil Guard also be entirely distinct from the Army?” (Hoyt 1957). No assurances were given by the proposal. Hoyt drew the following conclusions from the statute published by the GVN:

“Logistical support for the Civil Guard will come from ARVN and MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group], rather than from

USOM . . . Since the GVN proposes to look to ARVN (MAAG) for logistical support of the Civil Guard, it may be inferred that the Civil Guard is to be considered a military, rather than a civil police unit. There is no suggestion in the GVN paper that the Civil Guard is now considered, or is to become, a civil police organization . . . The GVN proposal does not agree in most respects with the recommendations made to GVN on the Civil Guard by the MSUG Police Administration Division. The GVN paper contemplates the performance of civil police functions by a military organization” (Hoyt 1957).

In short, Hoyt saw the statute as completely contrary to the recommendations of the police advisors. The document clearly agitated him; his criticisms of each section of the statute are far longer than the sections themselves. In the face of two years of supposed collaboration, Diem’s government had unapologetically ignored the MSUG’s work and gone its own way. What recourse did the MSUG have to compel the GVN to take its suggestions seriously?

Hoyt offered the following recommendations to Fishel at the close of his memo: “Pending written response to the questions raised herein, it is strongly recommended that execution of the [GVN requests] for Civil Guard equipment continue to be withheld. Unless the GVN, by written declaration, demonstrates that the Civil Guard (under whatever title) is to become a civil police organization, it is strongly recommended that USOM support for this organization be terminated” (Hoyt 1957). First off, Hoyt wanted answers to his many questions, and he would tie up GVN equipment requests in order to get them. Second, and more importantly, Hoyt suggested that all funding controlled by the MSUG be pulled from the Civil Guard program if the statute was not revised, effectively ending the MSUG’s involvement with the Guard. The Group had one card with which to sway Diem and his government: its control of United States government funds. If the GVN would not cooperate with the MSUG, the Group would withdraw funding.

This plan would have most likely been effective if the MSUG had been the only distributor of American aid in South Vietnam at the time. Unfortunately for the Group, it was not. By the contract signed in 1954 between the MSUG, the GVN, and the United States government, the MSUG was given charge of

civil funds coming from USOM. It had no control over military funds, which were allocated by MAAG. When Diem began construing the Civil Guard as a paramilitary organization, he presented his plan to representatives of the MAAG. Unlike the MSUG, the MAAG approved of the notion of the Guard as a military organization. Thus, finding funding for the Civil Guard was not difficult for Diem. He had a choice: organize the Guard as a civil police and receive funding from USOM via MSUG, or establish it as a military organization and support it with the MAAG funds allocated to the ARVN. Given the situation, the MSUG did not have any real leverage on Diem. Its advice could be reasonable and well supported, but it weighed little next to the opinion of the president.

In late 1957, the GVN finalized its proposed organization of the Civil Guard. Little effort was made to accommodate the concerns of the MSUG. One important change was made in the statute, however: the Civil Guard remained directly under the presidency; it did not become attached to the Ministry of Defense. This fell in line with Diem’s desire to ensure the Guard remained loyal to the presidency, not to any ministry or general.

The MSUG was extremely opposed to the new organization of the Guard, and was now faced with a difficult decision: Would the MSUG continue to fund the Civil Guard after its ultimatum had been ignored? If they pulled funding, MSUG advisors would lose any right to counsel Diem and his government on the administration of the Guard, the largest police organization in Vietnam. However, if they continued their support, the Group might lose credibility by not following up on its threat. The problem framed a broader question: was the MSUG providing a valuable service in advising the GVN police forces?

This issue was one of the first tackled by Ralph Smuckler, Wesley Fishel’s replacement as chief advisor, who arrived in Saigon in early 1958. Correspondence between Smuckler and Stanley Sheinbaum, the coordinator of the MSUG in East Lansing, displays the difficulties faced by the Group at the close of the Civil Guard issue. On April 22, 1958, Smuckler wrote: “The biggest issue in Saigon at the present time is the Civil Guard issue. It has taken some new turns since your departure and, indeed, since Wes’s departure and my arrival” (Chief Advisor 1958). Things lay quiet for three weeks, and then, on May 13, again from Smuckler to Sheinbaum: “About three days ago we received a

translated arête which transfers the Civil Guard from the Presidency to the Ministry of Interior. This is a step in the right direction and we are happy to see it occur. There are many doubts, however, as to the permanence of this change and as to the actual shift such a paper reorganization implies” (Chief Advisor 1958). Transferring the Guard to the Ministry of the Interior was a huge concession to the MSUG; the advisors had been pushing for such a change since their arrival. Yet why was Diem making this move now? After three years of dealing with the wily South Vietnamese president, the MSUG advisors were becoming suspicious of his motives and the sincerity of his actions.

After another month of correspondence between Saigon and East Lansing in which there was much indecision and few definitive statements, there came a revealing memo from Smuckler on June 5. He opened: “The general questions concerning the police program have come to a sharp focus during this week . . . I now feel fairly competent to state a University position . . . As I see it, the Civil Guard should be advised by USOM personnel. It is a considerably different police force than the other units in Vietnam and will require somewhat different recruitment, equipment backstopping, and training . . . USOM should develop the staff necessary to handle this” (Chief Advisor 1958). With Diem’s apparent overtures regarding the Civil Guard and the recent turnover of MSUG personnel in South Vietnam, the administration and advisement of the Guard was again in question. Smuckler saw USOM, not the MSUG, as the best organization to take up the task. The reputation of MSU had suffered in recent years because of its Vietnam project. Public concern was rising over the nature of the university’s involvement with the South Vietnamese police and military. Should a public university be devoting its funds and faculty to such pursuits? The MSUG was handling large quantities of weapons and military equipment in its quest to modernize the GVN police agencies and this, too, was drawing fire in East Lansing. Smuckler was now moving to reduce the MSUG’s police project as well as the magnitude of the Group’s involvement with the Civil Guard and other South Vietnamese agencies.

The June 5 memo to Sheinbaum explained: “Thus, we should go into the next contract period with MSU expecting to continue certain police activities and discontinue others. The activities we would continue would include the work of the Research and Training Section, the Municipal Police advisor, and a portion

of the VBI’s advisor’s work” (Chief Advisor 1958). By implication, the MSUG’s work with the Civil Guard would have been discontinued, as well as its role as an advisor to Diem on a wide array of issues. This latter role had been made possible largely thanks to Wesley Fishel, who had been a close personal friend of Diem. When with the MSUG in Vietnam, Fishel had met daily with the president for extended strategy sessions. He had kept the MSUG on good terms with GVN officials during periods of friction and was largely responsible for the extensive reach and influence of the project. With Fishel back home in the States, the MSUG’s rapport with the GVN president was significantly diminished. Smuckler saw the MSUG’s future role in police administration as “a phase-down rather than a phase-out,” a point which he thought necessary to emphasize both to Sheinbaum and to the director of the USOM (Chief Advisor June 5, 1958).

However, the issue was not fully settled. After meeting with the United States ambassador and Diem, Smuckler wrote to Sheinbaum a week later that “the Civil Guard will not be a civil police force as we would define it. Therefore, it now looks as though we will not work with the Civil Guard. USOM will also probably pull back and devote its attention to the traditional civil police force, namely the Surete and Municipal Police” (Chief Advisor June 19, 1958). Smuckler now stated openly that the MSUG would no longer be involved with the Civil Guard. In addition to the MSUG withdrawing its support, USOM was also refusing to fund the Guard independently. Once again, MAAG was the only source of foreign aid on which Diem might rely to fund his version of the Civil Guard.

By July of 1958, the Civil Guard issue appeared to be resolved. Arthur Brandstatter, the director of police administration in East Lansing, summarized the situation nicely in letters to Smuckler and Hoyt, both in Saigon. To Hoyt, he wrote: “I suppose everyone is relieved now that the President has settled the Civil Guard question. I shall appreciate being informed regarding the developments that take place with MAAG or others as a result of this decision. If our police group is to be involved at all, I would like to know about it” (Brandstatter to Hoyt 1958). And to Smuckler: “In [Hoyt’s] most recent letter, he states that the Civil Guard question is about to be settled, and unless the President does an about-face, everybody is expecting the Civil Guard to become a paramilitary organization” (Brandstatter to Chief Advisor 1958).

But Diem was not finished; he still had one move left to make. At the time, the MSUG was in the process of renegotiating its contract with the USOM and the GVN. Diem saw an opportunity to define the Guard to his advantage:

“It appears that the Civil Guard will be a combination of military and civilian [forces] to the point where USOM can supply equipment . . . USOM may have to set up some kind of a division or organization to handle the Civil Guard. Barrows [the USOM representative] appears to accept our position and is not applying pressure for us to become involved in the Civil Guard . . . We do not know if the Government desires any civilian advisors at all” (Chief Advisor August 20, 1958).

In short, MSU was abandoning all of its work with the Civil Guard, leaving USOM to take up the slack. Diem had struck a balance between the civil and military aspects of the Guard, such that USOM could justify funding the organization. The president had managed to arrange for both MAAG and USOM to provide backing for his Guard, cutting out the MSUG altogether. The president would no longer have to deal with the plans and advice of the interfering MSUG but would still receive the funding it used to provide. The MSU professors had been completely outmaneuvered.

The next day, Sheinbaum wrote to Smuckler, clarifying the MSU administration’s position on the recent developments in Saigon:

“The University desires to retain its involvement in the police program in Saigon . . . MSU has a long-range interest in continuing its support because of its plans to develop its on-campus international police curriculum . . . MSU must withdraw from those action-oriented aspects of the police program; e.g., the administration of U.S. aid equipment . . . MSUG’s efforts have to be concentrated in those educational and advisory activities that will represent an extension of the School of Police Administration’s on-campus program . . . Only by doing this can East Lansing provide substantive guidance and thereby make the University’s involvement meaningful . . . Further, the present nature of the police program has subjected MSU to criticism. An educa-

tionally-oriented program in Saigon enriches the experience of MSU staff in a manner that enhances the on-campus program” (Sheinbaum 1958).

The MSUG’s failure to exert its will over Diem, coupled with increasing criticism on campus, had caused the university to reflect on its involvement in Vietnam. There was a realization that MSU had overreached; its project in South Vietnam was functioning at the detriment of its programs in East Lansing. The university was hiring “professors” for the sole purpose of working at the MSUG in Saigon, it was distributing arms to foreign police forces, and it was attempting to direct the police of a sovereign nation. Three years in, this behavior was beginning to draw fire at home without producing the desired effects abroad. During the next contract period of the MSUG, the Group would become smaller; the police project in particular would be greatly reduced.

After three years of memos and meetings, negotiations and politicking, all of the MSUG’s involvement had come to little, if anything at all. Diem, stubborn and shrewd, maintained the Civil Guard as a loosely defined paramilitary organization under his tight control. The MSUG had persistently tried to reorganize the Guard, but to no avail.

So then, just how effective was the MSU Advisory Group? What impact was it able to achieve in South Vietnam?

In reality, the Group had a significant impact. In the areas of civil administration and nation building, the MSUG met with moderate success. In civil areas, the MSUG was the primary provider of United States aid, which gave it the leverage necessary to influence GVN policy. In the field of police administration, the MSUG’s influence was checked by the presence of MAAG and USOM, alternative sources of funding for Diem. The Group managed to make substantial progress, however, with its weapons training program, and it provided much-needed police equipment. The organization and infrastructure of the VBI was improved significantly as well. However, when it came to the Civil Guard, and whenever the MSUG attempted to influence South Vietnamese policy, its efforts were frustrated. This is best illustrated by the MSUG’s publications: the police administration division’s Report on the Police of Vietnam, and the Final Report Covering Activities of the MSUG.

The Report on the Police of Vietnam, written by Smuckler (1955, 6-8) in the first year of significant MSU involvement in Vietnam, describes the Civil Guard as follows:

“At this stage of its operations the Civil Guard is primarily a semi-military organization taking over operations from the military as the situation becomes less tense. It has the power to perform as a general police organization but because of the nature of the police problem in Vietnam it has had to operate as a semi-military organization . . . Organizational structure of all units of the [Civil Guard] have been fixed by decree of the Minister of the Interior. On November 19, 1955 President Diem transferred control of the Civil Guard to the Presidency. Whether or not this is an extremely temporary shift is not known at present. Assurances have been given that in the long run the Civil Guard will remain a civilian police unit though in the immediate future there is some room for doubt.”

This was written just as the Civil Guard was becoming a major sticking point between the MSUG and President Diem. All of the obstacles that the MSUG was to encounter were foreshadowed by this report. The Guard, originally designed to function under the Ministry of the Interior, had been moved to the presidency by Diem. Already Smuckler was questioning the motive and duration of this action. Smuckler also noted the “semi-military” nature of the organization. These issues concerned the MSUG advisors from the start and would continue to frustrate them throughout their time in Vietnam.

The final report, written the early 1960s, marks the difficulties that arose during the MSUG’s involvement:

“The MSUG advisory work for the Civil Guard was marked with a continuous series of impasses, stemming primarily from a divergence of opinions as to the role of the Civil Guard within the police and security system. Despite these conflicts a number of police-type training courses, adapted to the paramilitary nature of the Civil Guard, were conducted; and vehicles and related police equipment were distributed to them. Beyond these accomplishments not much progress was made

in implementing plans for improving the organization of the Civil Guard. Advice to and support of the Civil Guard was transferred to the Public Safety Division of USOM in 1959” (Final Report).

Understandably, the report tried to paint MSUG involvement in South Vietnam in the best light possible. However, it had difficulty describing the MSUG’s involvement with the Civil Guard. First of all, the lengthy Final Report only dedicated two paragraphs to the Guard. This is surprising, given that the Guard occupied a central place in the MSUG police project. Clearly, there was little positive to say about the MSUG and the Guard when the advisors reflected on their experiences. The final report did give a fair evaluation of the Civil Guard issue in the small space it allotted, though: the MSUG had seen some success in updating the Guard’s equipment and infrastructure, and the advisors had encountered a “series of impasses” regarding the administration of the Guard. What the report did not state was that at each of these impasses, the MSUG had failed to achieve its goals. The fact of the matter is that for all of the MSUG’s efforts, little changed regarding the Civil Guard. The 1955 evaluation of the Guard described the state of the Guard in 1959 reasonably well. Despite nearly four years of trying, the MSUG failed to institute any meaningful change in the organization or purpose of the Civil Guard, South Vietnam’s largest and most extensive police organization.

MSU had gone into South Vietnam in 1955 hoping to make large improvements in the nation’s organizational and administrative structure. The MSUG attacked a wide variety of problems, ranging from the training of civil servants to the organization of the country’s police agencies. Over the first three years of the project’s existence, the MSUG advisors were drawn into a long disagreement with President Diem and the GVN over the nature and administration of the South Vietnamese Civil Guard. The MSUG tried many times to shape the Guard into a civilian police administration, but in the end the Guard was organized as a paramilitary force by Diem. This Civil Guard issue highlights a larger problem with the MSUG’s involvement in South Vietnam; the fact that the Group lacked the leverage to give force to its recommendations to the Government of South Vietnam. 🍀

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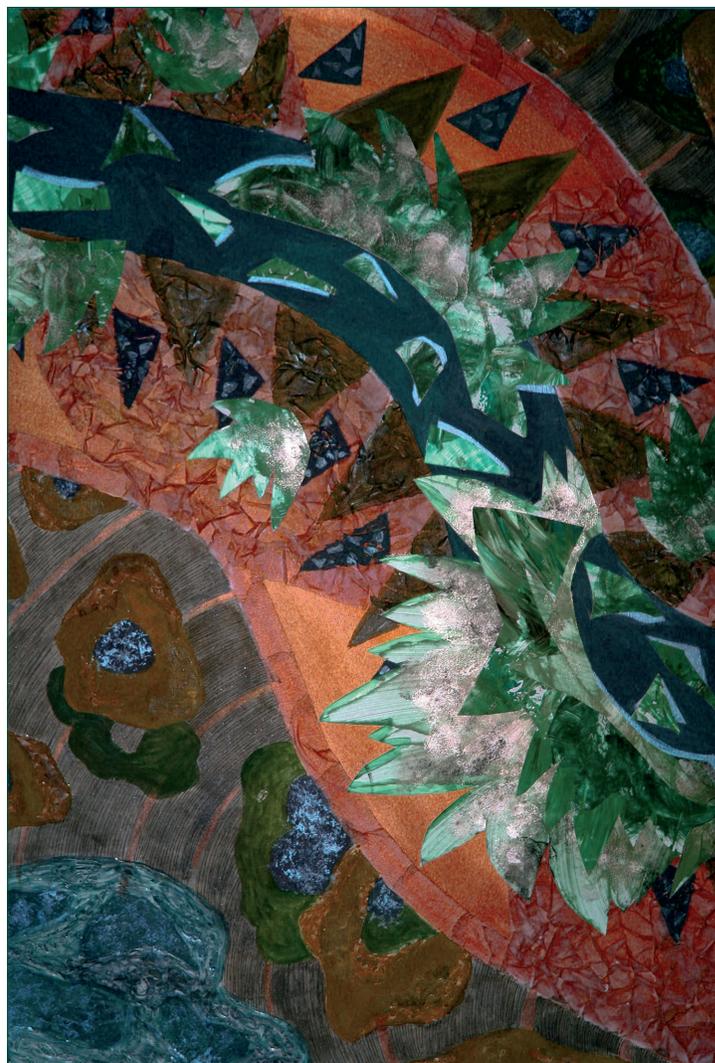
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## “Slithering in Space”

Aubrey Emiko Owada

Apparel and Textile Design



### Artist's Statement

*This piece was inspired by tattoos of powerful mythological serpents that are fierce but elegant.*

# 2011 and 2012 National and International Fellowship and Scholarship Recipients

Each year, MSU undergraduates and alumni are awarded highly competitive national and international fellowships and scholarships (NIFS). In this issue of ReCUR, we have profiled recent recipients of these prestigious awards.

## Kaitlin Tyler *by Craig Pearson*

Apple Valley, Minnesota, native Kaitlin Tyler studies the effects of microcracking in hydroxyapatite, the inorganic component of bone. This research has helped earn her the honor of being named a Goldwater scholar for 2011. Tyler is one of 275 scholarship recipients selected from more than a thousand students nominated by the faculty of colleges and universities across the country. The award honors outstanding mathematics, science, and engineering students, and covers the costs of tuition, fees, books, and room and board.

In addition to her research with Dr. Melissa Baumann in the Department of Chemical Engineering and



Materials Science, Tyler is involved with multiple engineering groups on campus, including the honors society Tau Beta Pi and the Society of Women Engineers (SWE), of which she is currently the chapter president. "Being in these organizations, particularly SWE, has given me more confidence and the chance to become a leader," says

Tyler. She also notes that participating in various research projects has confirmed her desire to pursue research as a career.

The Goldwater scholarship has already had a major impact on her academic and professional development. Tyler, who plans to attend graduate school, says that some schools were willing to accept her based solely on her Goldwater distinction. After earning her PhD in materials science and engineering, with a focus on either biomaterials or lithium ion battery materials, Tyler plans to conduct research in either a corporate setting or academia. Asked what advice she would give to students interested in pursuing national and international fellowships, Tyler says, "Just apply! It doesn't hurt, and you might be surprised at what you might get! I certainly was."

## Mairin Chesney *by Craig Pearson*



Computer science sophomore Mairin Chesney was one of 282 students nationwide to be awarded the Goldwater scholarship in 2012, an honor given on the basis of academic merit and demonstrated potential. The scholarship, which is restricted to undergraduate sophomores and juniors in the engineering, science, and mathematics disciplines, funds the costs of tuition, fees, books, and room and board for up to two years.

Chesney, a native of Brighton, Michigan, currently researches the effects of parasites on the evolution of sexual recombination, through use of digital organisms. Chesney and her mentor, Dr. Charles Ofria in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, utilize computer programs to learn about whether parasites may have driven organisms to choose sexual recombination over asexual recombination. "I love research," says Chesney. "It is fascinating to be able to be the first person in the world to see something." In addition to her work with digital evolution, Chesney is involved in the Women's Chamber Choir, in the VEX Robotics team, and in actively trying to bring more women into engineering.

Chesney sees both graduate school and industry in her future. "I eventually want to be a college professor, but I want to gain some industry experience first," she says. "There are so many opportunities for computer scientists, and I want to experience at least some of them." Chesney encourages her fellow students to take advantage of their opportunities at MSU, especially in applying for scholarships: "I have gotten denied far more scholarships than I have received, but with persistence it will all work out." She also highly recommends undergraduate research, adding, "Find something you are passionate about, and do it!"

## Reid Holzbauer *by Craig Pearson*



Reid Holzbauer, a senior in International Relations and Arabic Language with a specialization in Muslim Studies, earned a 2012 David L. Boren Undergraduate Scholarship. Sponsored by the National Security Education Program, which places focus on geographic areas, languages, and fields of study identified as critical to national security, Boren Scholarships grant undergraduates the opportunity to study abroad in these commonly underrepresented areas. Holzbauer's award will take him to Egypt to study Arabic at the University of Alexandria during the 2012-13 academic year. He was one of just 161 winners of the Boren Scholarship from a record pool of 1014 applicants.

Holzbauer, an Honors College member, has been active in many campus organizations. These include the Theta Chi Fraternity, where he served as head judiciary board member, social chair, new member educator, and recruitment chair, as well as the MSU chapter of Amnesty International, of which he was vice president. He worked as a research assistant for Dr. Zahra Jamal of James Madison College, helping transform her dissertation on Ismaili voluntarism into a book for undergraduate students.

In June, Holzbauer began his program with the American Councils Overseas Flagship Program, which consists of taking classes, working for five hours a week with a language partner, and engaging in an internship. He plans on a career working for the Department of State, and hopes to return to graduate school to earn a doctorate in International Relations or Comparative Cultures and Politics. "Have a clear plan with what you want to do professionally," Holzbauer advises for students interested in pursuing national and international fellowships and scholarships. "Also, I highly recommend studying critical needs languages as there are many scholarship/professional opportunities within this field."

## Amy Pochodylo *by Craig Pearson*

Amy Pochodylo, a third-year chemistry major, was named a 2011 Goldwater scholar. Two hundred seventy-five scholarships were awarded from a pool of more than a thousand mathematics, science, and engineering students nominated on the basis of academic merit by the faculties of colleges and universities nationwide. The Goldwater scholarship covers the costs of tuition, fees, books, and room and board, up to \$7500 a year for the remainder of the student's undergraduate studies.

Pochodylo, who was raised in Troy, Michigan, conducts research on metal organic frameworks (MOFs) with Dr. Robert LaDuca, a professor in the Chemistry Department and at Lyman Briggs College. As part of the university's Professorial Assistantship program, Pochodylo had the opportunity to join the research project at the beginning of her freshman year, and she has been working with Dr. LaDuca ever since. "MOFs are crystals that have potential applications for ion separation, gas storage, and nuclear waste remediation," Pochodylo explains. Her lab synthesizes these frameworks and reports their structures and any useful properties—information that can be applied by other labs to projects such as gas storage. Pochodylo cites her research experience as the highlight of her many activities at MSU: "Getting to work on an actual research project—and direct my own—as an undergraduate has been extremely valuable."



The Goldwater scholarship recognizes her outstanding research, but Pochodylo says the experience itself has been the greatest reward: "The work that I did in the lab is really what has advanced my academic and professional development." Pochodylo plans to combine her passion for environmental issues with her love of chemistry and research to solve some of the environmental crises we are currently facing. "It's important to do what you love," she advises fellow students. "If something doesn't seem like a good fit, keep looking."

## Craig Pearson *by Craig Pearson*



Sophomore Craig Pearson of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, was named a 2012 Goldwater scholar, one of 282 undergraduates given the honor nationwide. The award, which covers the costs of tuition, fees, books, and room and board for up to four semesters, recognizes outstanding students in the fields of mathematics, science, and engineering. Winners were selected from a pool of 1,123 applicants nominated by their institutions on the basis of academic merit.

Pearson is pursuing dual degrees in biochemistry and molecular biology and English. He is a member of an interdisciplinary research team attempting to develop a drug delivery device to treat an early-onset genetic blindness disorder. Pearson credits this research opportunity, initiated through MSU's Professorial Assistantship program, as a fundamental aspect of his college experience. "Working with my research mentor Dr. Melissa Baumann for the past two years has opened so many doors," Pearson says. "I'm able to explore my interests and work with a phenomenally talented group of people." He also works as a columnist for the State News and serves as a member of the Undergraduate Research Advisory Board, in addition to participating in several on-campus clubs.

Pearson has used his undergraduate research experiences to bring other students to MSU. Pearson plans to attend graduate school for an MD/PhD and work in biomedical research. Regarding advice for current students, Pearson encourages them to take advantage of everything that MSU has to offer: "Always say yes. It's all about attitude and a positive outlook. Never be afraid to go out and make something happen."

## Rebecca Farnum *by Craig Pearson*

Rebecca Farnum graduated from MSU this year with a bevy of majors: interdisciplinary humanities, international relations, anthropology, and global and area studies: international development. She has studied abroad at universities in Israel and Egypt, and her outstanding résumé and passion for international issues earned her a 2012 Marshall scholarship, a highly selective award that grants American students two years of fully funded study at any university in the United Kingdom.

Farnum, who hails from Mount Pleasant, Michigan, was also named a Udall scholar in 2011. Udall scholarships recognize students who have demonstrated commitment to careers related to the environment. At MSU, Farnum has been involved in several student groups and organizations, including serving as chair and cofounder of the Campus Interfaith Council and chair of the MLK Student Diversity Council. She has also been active in research, completing a thesis with advisor Mark Axelrod that explored regional cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa with a focus on issues of food and water security. She describes the project as an amalgam of research projects on African famine issues, Israeli international development, and urban economic development. This work, enlightened by her own experiences, was facilitated by the James Madison College honors program.



Farnum acknowledges the great opportunity afforded by the Marshall scholarship: "Graduate study in the United Kingdom is going to be a critical part of my academic development. Institutions in the UK are exploring food and water issues in ways that the US simply is not." As a future university professor, she hopes to bring attention to issues of food security in the Middle East and North Africa. Says Farnum, "I hope to 'feed peace' by feeding people."

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*Students interested in applying for these and other awards should contact the Director of the MSU National and International Fellowships and Scholarships Office at [nifs@msu.edu](mailto:nifs@msu.edu) or visit [www.nifs.msu.edu](http://www.nifs.msu.edu)*

# African-American Vernacular Dance

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## Abstract

Ethnographer D. Soyini Madison observes that “when we perform . . . we realize truths about ourselves and our world” (Madison 2005, 171). This is certainly the case with African-American Vernacular Dance (AAVD). Current academic work reinforces the popular view of AAVD as entertainment by highlighting the art’s technical and aesthetic value and offers a limited discussion on its social implications. Yet AAVD illuminates largely invisible, unjust power structures. The current study situates AAVD within the existing sociocultural, historical, and political contexts that generate it. Through an analysis of breaking (also known as break-dance), I seek to address the sociopolitical meaning of AAVD and how popular dance forms such as breaking speak to critical issues of race, class, and power relations in society. Using performance theory, I analyze breaking as a mimesis (reflection), poiesis (meaning), and kinesis (intervention). Understanding this art form to be capable of expressing identity and building community allows AAVD performance to reach its fullest potential, giving to marginalized youth both an art and a community.

## Introduction

Moving bodies streak across the dance floor, limbs fly, while heads spin and impromptu cipher circles break out at the biggest gathering of young, hip dancers I have ever laid eyes on. Performers are warming up, igniting sparks of excitement wherever their nimble bodies touch the floor. These performers all share a common passion: breaking, also known as break-dance. These images set the scene for my understanding of AAVD, a dance attended and performed primarily by the youth and pertinent to the African-American community either through its origin or performers.

In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, Madison observes that, “when we perform and witness cultural performances, we realize truths about ourselves and our world that we cannot realize in our day-to-day existence” (Madison 2005, 171). This is certainly the case with AAVD, largely seen as a form of entertainment within popular culture. Exist-

ing scholarship reinforces this view, highlighting the technical and aesthetic value of breaking, and other dance forms associated with black performance. Yet this culmination of physical feats can go further and serve as an instrument of social agency, intervention, and resistance. Missing in the existing scholarship is a deconstruction of the dance itself and its sociopolitical implications. Beyond aesthetics, AAVD provides marginalized youth with a means to assert their voice—and insert their bodies—in various public spheres that have traditionally excluded or silenced them. In this way, dance constitutes a form of resistance. It defies the structures of marginalization and invisibility through the sheer force of its existence.

In the current study, I conducted a critical ethnographic analysis to gain insight into the sociocultural, political, and economic contexts that generate AAVD. The project was guided by two major questions: What is the sociopolitical meaning of AAVD, and how do popular dance forms such as breaking speak to critical issues of race, class, and power relations in society? Using performance theory as my theoretical framework, I analyzed breaking as a mimesis (reflection), poiesis (meaning), and kinesis (intervention). AAVD allows its performers to display their identity and to create a sense of community, empowering marginalized youth to take charge of their lives and engage with their community.

## Literature Review

The current scholarly discussion on AAVD covers a wide spectrum of dance genres, eras, and places. These include, most recently, breaking and its creation culture: hip-hop. What follows is an outline of that spectrum within the historical, political, and economic contexts. Within these contexts, AAVD stands as a form of agency, resistance, and intervention. However, the conversation currently lacks a detailed exploration and deconstruction of the performance itself.

Black performance has played an integral role in the formation of the African-American identity from the introduction of slavery in the American colonies until today and is well narrated in *The Dance in America* by dance critic Walter Terry (1971). The African-

American tradition has included several eras of dance, beginning with the plantation era and followed by the ragtime, swing, soul, and late-twentieth-century eras. During the civil rights period, AAVD claimed a prominent role on the political scene by the nature of its performers and their racial identity. One example of this was when Brenda Dixon Gottschild, later the author of *The Black Dancing Body*, would audition for “Broadway musicals for which [she] knew that even the best African American dancers would not be hired.” She did this “in response to the civil rights sit-ins that were going on across the nation . . . so that [her] black presence couldn’t be totally ignored” (Dixon Gottschild 2003, 3). Throughout the eras, black performance has been a means for forcing political agency by threatening the dominant white-based structure (Terry 1971).

All forms of AAVD, including breaking, rely heavily on the audience–performer connection. They are meant to expose, to turn heads, and to challenge the perceptions of their audience (Hanna 1983). These dance forms represent a threat to people in power, because youth are often the primary guiding force for a movement over which adults have no control (Kopytko 1986).

The history of hip-hop and its emergence in the public sphere is a prime example of the agency and resistance black performance can offer to AAVD participants. In her book *Black Noise*, author, critic, and professor of African studies Tricia Rose outlines the emergence of hip-hop in an economically and socially downtrodden section of New York. In the 1970s, “substantial postindustrial shifts in economic conditions, access to housing, demographics, and communication networks” were all part of the “economic and social restructuring of urban America” (Rose 1994, 26-27). These conditions exacerbated the socioeconomic gap between races, particularly impacting African-Americans and Latinos. The transformation from an industrial economy to a service economy gave many opportunities to the privileged (often white) elites to gentrify New York’s downtown, subsequently pushing out the working class (Rose 1994). To make things worse, the media constructed an image of ruin in areas of New York, such as the South Bronx, depicting these neighborhoods as “drained of life, energy, and vitality” (Rose 1994, 27) and failing to include the actual voices of its residents.

Later, it would be these same silenced individuals who would find hip-hop and its physical manifestation, breaking, as a means for expressing themselves. Hip-hop expert and author of *Hip Hop America* Nelson George explains that hip-hop gave “voice to the tensions and contradictions in the public urban landscape during a period of substantial transformation in New York” (George 2005, 22).

Hip-hop was pioneered by African-American youth and later pursued by Latino youth. The three key players—Afrika Bambaataa, King Grandmaster Flash, and DJ Kool Herc—laid the foundation for hip-hop as we know it. Within the emerging breaking scene, some of the main dance crews were Rock Steady Crew, Super Cr3w, and New York City Breakers. Hip-hop came to “reflect and contest the social roles open to urban inner-city youths at the end of the twentieth century” (Rose 1994, 72). These youths used this dance form to resist the dominant social structures and create their own reality, uncensored by the media.

Dance historian Sally Banes was largely responsible for the surfacing of breaking in the public sphere (Banes 1981). Her scholarship followed the history of the dance and, most importantly, legitimized the dance to a wider audience. Banes opened up breaking to academic research through her historical lens. Her scholarship made way for breaking to be researched as a legitimate art form and an alternative to gang violence (Osumare 2002).

Current literature discusses AAVD as a “social commentary” and a means to voice identity in the social sphere, thereby intervening in the lives of its performers (Jackson 2001, 42). However, there needs to be more literature examining, through deconstruction, the way AAVD has these sociopolitical implications. To qualify that dance has the “capacity for shifting sociocultural meaning,” scholars such as Jonathan Jackson in his article use terms such as “values, aesthetics, and actual movement traditions” (Jackson 2001, 43). These terms assume that the values and aesthetics of the performers are obvious. However, in order to critically analyze the sociopolitical implications of AAVD performance, the details of what the performers believe are important yet missing in current AAVD literature.

While asserting dance as a means for intervention, existing literature seems to brush past the critical ethnographic details. In her book “The Performer–Audience Connection,” research scholar Judith

Hanna describes dance as challenging the norms of society (Hanna 1983, 7). Jackson scratches the surface by expanding on the technical changes in the dance (Jackson 2001, 46). In “Global Breakdancing and the Intercultural Body,” dance scholar Halifu Osumare stresses the intervening power of AAVD (Osumare 2002). Another scholar on dance, John Perpener, explores how racial minorities can use dance and art to confront “dominant power structures and oppressive social realities” (Perpener 2000, 66). The scholarly conversation on AAVD gives insight into the core values and beliefs of dancers and outlines the art form’s potential as an instrument for social change, agency, and resistance.

While these ideas have validity, the details backing them up are missing. This study seeks to support the existing scholarship by deconstructing a form of AAVD and critically analyzing it on a physical and emotional level within its sociopolitical context.

## Theoretical Framework

The various components of breaking (music, the performance, dancers and audience, and the self) form a deep web of connection. To better understand this connection, I used performance theory as a framework for my analysis. As described in Madison’s *Critical Ethnography*, these connections break down into three processes: mimesis, poiesis, and kinesis. Mimesis is the initial reflection of the performer’s life experience. Poiesis is the actual performance and the transmission of a message. The final stage, kinesis, is the instigation of action. This movement from mimesis to poiesis to kinesis can be understood “as another path in our endeavor to resist regimes of oppressive power structures” (Madison 2005, 171). In this framework, performance is a culmination of processes with the potential for great social impact.

## Method

To immerse myself in the breaking culture and create a critical ethnography, I attended events, documented impromptu dances on campus, and spoke with performers and audience members. I compiled qualitative research data such as field notes and performance video clips and conducted interviews and participant observation. Due to time restrictions, I had to limit my data collection to Michigan State University’s campus and to one form of AAVD. Because of this, the current study focuses on the student/youth experience and on

breaking. While students and youth represent a large portion of AAVD and breaking’s active participants, I recognize that there are many other groups of people who constitute an important part of this community.

From the data collected, I used performance theory to uncover the sociopolitical implications of the dance. The results section of this paper examines a set of videos. I recorded these videos in the spring of 2010, when I attended a “breaking battle” on MSU’s campus, where more than fifteen teams competed for a two-thousand-dollar cash prize. The audience included a huge number of community members, many with video cameras and cell phones poised to capture the spectacles to come.

The dance I focused on, breaking, is also known as b-boying/b-girling, or break dancing. The first two names are preferred by many of the dance’s performers and pioneers. From speaking with members of the dance community, I gathered that many dancers have distaste for the term break-dance since it is perceived by them as the “media” name. For this reason, and to remain consistent, I will be using the term breaking for the dance and breaker for the dancer. I also need to account for other names as I begin this exploration: Crews are the compilation of dancers that make up a breaking team. B-boy/b-girl can stand for break-boy/break-girl, Bronx-boy/Bronx-girl, or beat-boy/beat-girl. Cyphers are unplanned circles of dancers and onlookers where dancers take turns performing in the middle. Within these cyphers, no rules exist except those socially implied and unspoken. Some dance move terms include the head spin, freeze, and windmill. Finally, battles constitute a competition between breaking crews trying to “outdance” each other. In the competition, crews compete for dominance, reputation, and sometimes tangible rewards.

The URLs for each video clip are listed at the end of this paper under the “Video References” section. All the videos can be viewed at [bit.ly/GMMp4u](http://bit.ly/GMMp4u). I placed video and time references wherever my analysis alludes to a specific part of a video clip.

## Results

Breaking: More Than an Aesthetic: In my research, I examined AAVD as it parallels the interests of society’s most up-to-date members, its youth. Some dances that fall in this category include hip-hop, crunking, crumping, clowning, and breaking.

For many audience members and scholars alike, breaking is all about the aesthetic— nothing more than a visual wow. It's easy to mistake many genres of dance as simple entertainment. When watching any performance, one can easily become lost in the oohs and ahhs (video 2, 0:22–51), somewhere between the colorful costumes (or language) and head-bobbing rhythms. Breaking is even more prone to this treatment than some dance forms due to its small scholarly audience and emphasis on manipulating the body in explosive and energetic movements. Despite this, there is meaning beyond the stunning head spins and windmills. Though some groups use breaking as a way to show off and seem impressive, many express breaking as “not just another fad,” as breaking battle participant William Tang said in an interview (Tang 2010). MSU break-dance club member Sha Liang emphasized that “breakdancing is still dancing” and that the dance can mean different things for different people (Liang 2010).

**Mimesis: Dance as an Identity Marker:** Dancers will reflect who they are through their movements, image, and expression. This reflection of identity is the mimetic part of breaking. Anthropologist Victor Turner explains that “in performance he [the performer] reveals himself to himself” (Madison 2005, 150). Mimesis is the process by which “performance becomes a reflection of life” (169). For some dancers, breaking is a means of “expressing yourself . . . putting what you want to say out there,” according to Tang (Tang 2010). The dance can express identity in the form of style, clothing, emotions, and musical preferences, as well as simple, physical presence.

In video 1, the dancer with a white shirt and green logo (entering at 1:10) demonstrates his capacity to control his body in crisp time with the music. The dancer finds a balance between the power moves (acrobatic moves requiring upper body strength) and the more stylistically oriented moves. His main power move, his flip, is well controlled and in time with the musical peak led by female vocals. Later, he keeps up this pattern of emphasis by freezing during subsequent female vocal peaks (1:35 and 1:42). In this set of stylistic choices, the dancer shows his own deep relationship between the music and his body. Tang understands this relationship as “personal . . . [where] your style and the way you dance is up to you and not about how someone's going to tell you how to do it” (Tang

2010). There is no distinction between the dancers and their identity. How dancers perform is a manifestation of who they are and how they relate to the music and the dance.

In video 2, there is a montage of breakers expressing their style through various mediums. Each dancer brings to the floor a very different set of images representing his or her individual identity. The first dancer ends with musicality (0:18). By freezing during a transition into the single vocal portion of the song, he demonstrates his attentiveness to the music. The different facets of a dancer's character come together in his performance as he reveals his identity.

The next dancer in video 2 (entering at 0:24) contrasts the first dancer in his physical presence. He seems to emphasize the power moves. This presence receives a lot of audience response and also speaks to his relationship to the dance. He is connected more on a physical level and less musically. His art form lies in manipulating the relationship between his body and the dance form.

In breaking, as with many dance forms, clothing and accessories are a fashion statement. For Carl Bowers, a local breaker, “it's more like a lifestyle, . . . my clothing, my shoes, . . . [it's] how I represent myself” (Bowers 2010). When he goes out to buy clothes, he does not consider how others view his style but rather asks himself, “Can I wear this to break in?” This mentality commits him to his art form and shows that he takes his expression seriously. Since breaking can be an impromptu dance, integrating breaking clothing into his lifestyle comes naturally. Accessories can also have their own meaning. The dancer in the beginning of video 3 is wearing an arm brace. Several other dancers in this video also wore accessories. Besides being practical, these accessories are a fashion statement. Many breaking clothes imply that the wearer uses the floor; breakers rely on moves grounded in their elbows and wrists.

The emotional image is another form of identity demonstrated in breaking. Emotional expression in video 3 is seen in a display of “burns” (any physical motion meant to insult and challenge the other dancer). The dancers express their emotional burdens through feigned violent motions. Early on in the video, (0:25) a dancer “burns” the other crew by gesturing that he is going to “dispose” of

them. This is followed shortly afterward by the motion of throwing his hat at them threateningly. At one point in the middle of the battle there is an exchange between the dancer leaving the floor and the one entering (0:46). Expressing aggression, the dancer with the black pants and white belt throws a swing over the head of his opponent. This nonviolent expression of aggression is key to the dance etiquette.

MSU break-dance club member Eric Sarb also uses the dance as a way to emotionally unload himself. “To me . . . it means to be able to let myself free; to express myself . . . When I go out on the floor it’s not about winning or losing . . . it’s about having fun . . . being able to express what you feel” (Sarb 2010) Dancers can unload emotional stress and anger in a nonviolent, often playful way.

Other dancers express a more buoyant image as demonstrated in one dancer from video 4. The dancer in gray pants (entering at 0:17) begins by donning a cheerful grin. His dancing style is more upbeat, embellished with unique flairs to many of his power moves. One such flair is seen (0:44) when he freezes in the middle of a spin. He ends his dance with a good-humored freeze, one hand supporting his chin in a “thinking” pose.

Breakers express their identities through their bodies, constantly negotiating their presence, the music, and the dance. Bowers explains how he dances “to show [him]self.” Another dancer at the 2010 MSU breaking battle echoed Bower’s sentiment: When she dances, she does not “dance for people . . . [she dances] for [her]self.” Just as “with emceeing and with graffiti, and with dancing, . . . expressing yourself and . . . putting what you want to say out there” is integral to the art of breaking. These dancers express themselves and their identity by physically inserting their bodies into the social sphere. Their dance is their identity.

Breaking as an identity marker is mimetic in that it reflects the dancers. It reflects their life experience through their personality, their emotions, their music, and their lifestyle. As Tang eloquently put it, “b-boy dance just . . . expresses yourself” (Tang 2010).

Poiesis: Dance as a Community-Builder: While breaking is a means of expressing personal identity, each individual’s dance is also part of a much

larger whole. The community of dancers and audience is “all together . . . [and] you’re . . . together with that crew ’cause your crew’s behind you hyping you up, clapping out the beat for you (video 3, 0:35–45), blowing up all your stuff” (Sarb 2010). Every dance is a collaboration.

Looking at breaking as a poiesis means viewing the dance as a means of performing a message. Poiesis is the communicative aspect of a performance, where a message is conveyed from the performer to the audience, allowing the audience to experience the breaker’s identity. It is a common passion that starts a cypher and a common etiquette that keeps the impromptu performance going. For Bowers, community was the spark for his dancing passion. He recalls that while in school “there was a group of kids breakdancing on the third floor in a classroom . . . one of them started teaching me and that’s how I learned.” To further explain his sense of camaraderie within the breaking community, he says, “Go to any jam and ask anyone; they’re more than likely going to be willing to help you.” These experiences demonstrate the far-reaching community that is bound by a common connection to breaking.

The inner, or performer, community also supports its members. The members of each performance are connected by the bond of a similar goal or passion. Meanwhile, the outer community supports the performers through the performer–audience connection. Especially with dances such as breaking where there is heavy audience engagement, the audience and performers have a reciprocal relationship. At the 2010 MSU breaking battle, the audience became very involved. At the beginning, one emcee energized the crowd by sharing a rap accompanied by encouragement to “put your hands in the air” and various other call-and-response energy builders. The hall’s excitement was buzzing well before the official performance began. The beginning of the battle was high energy, and the audience became progressively more engrossed as the stakes became higher and certain crews were eliminated. Watching this art form, I myself fell in a trance from their acrobatic feats and smooth, rhythmic moves, merging with the rest of the audience into one engaged viewer.

Existence of an outer community, while obvious at breaking battles, also pertains to individual on-

campus groups such as the MSU break-dance club. The dance brings people together and “creates a community outside the club” (Sarb 2010). When the club performs on sidewalks, outside university buildings, or in front of local cafés, it commands attention. In these public venues, the audience joins the sidewalk community in tapping out the rhythm and supporting the dancers through its presence and engagement. Sarb explains that “people feel like they’re part of something whether they’re just clapping or really getting into it” (Sarb 2010). The community, while seemingly temporary, exists beyond the sidewalk. This is evident in the amount of participation in events such as the 2010 MSU breaking battle, where those same sidewalk onlookers come to support the dancers in competition.

In every breaking event, the performers bring with them a certain level of energy, but “the higher energy the crowd gets, the more energy [the dancer] get[s],” according to Sarb (Sarb 2010). In the breaking battle I studied, the audience reciprocated the energy from the dancers and in turn kept up the dancers’ stamina and ardor. An audience’s response creates a ricochet effect: audience energy translates into performer energy, and vice versa. Both audience and performers experience the dance, stirring the beginnings of a community bond.

There also exist smaller communities within each dance group. In video 5, an exchange between two dancers reveals exactly how much dance can bring people together. The community within the MSU break-dance club is like a family. What these two dancers say is very pertinent to this concept of community, but the exchange itself also demonstrates an underlying message. While Sarb is attempting to capture the MSU breaking community, fellow breaker Liang fills in when he cannot find the words. Community members share a common vernacular and understand one another. Even in their speech, they are united by this common passion: dance, connected on such an intimate level that they can complete each other’s sentences. The community that breaking builds instills trust and a common understanding among its members. To Sarb and many dancers like him, this familial connection is special. He surely speaks for many when he says, “That’s something I wouldn’t trade for anything.”

Kinesis: A Means for Intervention: Dance as a means for change can be framed by kinesis. While the dance may be abstract in its whole-body movement and fast-paced, bass-booming music, it is also very potent. Kinesis is the “point at which reflection and meaning now evoke intervention and change” (Madison 2005, 170). Breaking is threatening because it is an art led by the youth, danced by the youth, taught by the youth, and watched by the youth. While movies and other media present stylized versions of breaking, within local communities such as the MSU break-dance club, every breaker still has his or her own personal style and interpretation of the beat. Dancers are free to make up new moves as the dance continues to evolve. The dance is a means of intervention and change just as it changes itself. Dancers have the power to shape the dance, and this threatens the status quo. Anyone can take advantage of this powerful outlet. Marginalized minorities, those of low socioeconomic statuses, and anyone oppressed by social structures and in search of an identity need only see the dance on TV or on the street to start using it to engage with his or her identity and community.

## Discussion

Since its inception in the 1970s, breaking has grown steadily in popularity. This gives the dance quite a breadth in terms of influence. Not only do people of all different backgrounds practice it in the United States, but it has spread globally. The dance is special in that a large portion of youth culture has embraced it. The dance is physically challenging and fast-paced. Its movements are exciting, its style is beat-driven, and it calls for rigorous practice and a fine balance between musicality and acrobatics.

While the dance is certainly meaningful to older people, the sheer number of youth practicing breaking gives significance to this study and its focus on youth. Today’s youth are the leaders and citizens of tomorrow, and breaking rivals the attention youth give to television, drugs, and violence. A culture of violence exists that is perpetuated by the media through violent images, lyrics, movies, and events. Technology-tied, urban youth have become desensitized to violence. They seek solace from the confusion of high divorce rates, a ruined economy, and an underfunded education system. In the midst of this broken situation, it is easy to understand why youth might distract themselves with the adrenaline of violence and the fog of drugs, but there are better outlets.

When hip-hop began, “it was an accidental, offhand discovery of a way to distinguish themselves [urban youth] in a very direct, self-contained, and totally controllable way,” explains George Nelson in *Hip Hop America*. “Hip hop was not a mass market concept. It was not a career move” (George 2005, 20). Today, hip-hop has taken on a more commercial nature in mainstream popular culture. According to Rose, “hip hop signs and meanings are converted, and behaviors are relabeled by dominant institutions” (Rose 1994, 40). Part of hip-hop’s potency emerges from its commercial relabeling, leading to breaking and hip-hop culture in general capturing a large, global audience.

The commercialization of hip-hop brings tension between its origins as an uplifting dance form and its mainstream use for profit making. However, the market has not entirely removed the art form’s ability to affect change. Popularization of hip-hop has made it more accessible and often forced its participants to push the edge of originality in an attempt to stay competitive. Furthermore, in the case of breaking, the commercialization is offset by the fact that it retains a strong local presence, as demonstrated in the case of MSU’s breaking community.

Dance “is the point of subversion that breaks through boundaries of domestication and hegemony” (Rose 1994, 171). As an art form, it gives an outlet for personal expression. As a passion, it brings people together to form communities, bystanders and all. These implications are simple but powerful. The current study establishes breaking’s implications for identity and community building. By bringing an awareness of dance as more than an aesthetic, I hope to prevent breaking from being completely drowned in the media hype and to keep it in the hands of its creators. I hope to keep it in the hands of the youth, so that they may have an outlet for their identities. I speak, so that in breaking, the youth may find both an art and a home.

## Conclusion

Through observing and speaking with breakers on MSU’s campus, I have come to learn about the more subtle implications of breaking. Each of the dancers offered their own perspectives, yet overarching implications began to show through. When framed by performance theory, breaking becomes a meaningful and nuanced dance. The breaking performance imitates the life and experience of its performers. Breaking is a

channel for the dancers’ identities and furthers these identities by offering them to the audience. This connection creates a community bond between the dancers and the audience. When understood as both an identity marker and a community builder, breaking—and, more broadly speaking, AAVD in general—can begin to reach its full potential. AAVD is more than a simple visual experience. In communities shaped by AAVD, it provides both an art and a space in which to share the human experience. 🌟

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## Video References

All video clips can be viewed at [bit.ly/GMMp4u](http://bit.ly/GMMp4u). Following are the individual URLs for the videos referenced in the results section of this paper.

- Video 1 <http://youtu.be/DEkx8lBc0gw>  
Video 2 [http://youtu.be/S8YGfpy\\_5pk](http://youtu.be/S8YGfpy_5pk)  
Video 3 <http://youtu.be/ZPRlqUZROv0>  
Video 4 <http://youtu.be/ewJRwmeLzI>  
Video 5 <http://youtu.be/cvQ-7QhcYmg>

# Comparing Rich and Sparse Manipulatives in Narrative Comprehension in Second Graders

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## Abstract

This study examines the use of manipulatives as narrative text reading aides for second graders. There were three conditions in the study: (1) a rich condition in which children moved detailed objects in accordance with the action sentences in stories, (2) a sparse condition in which they moved abstract objects, and (3) a reread condition in which they viewed the detailed objects and reread the action sentences. Children in both object movement conditions outperformed children in the reread condition, and there was no difference in performance based on object richness.

## Introduction

Reading comprehension is complex. It requires the reader to decode and interpret words, make sense of a passage, and retain meaning for later reference. This complexity has been captured by models such as the latent semantic analysis (LSA) (Landauer and Dumais 1997) and the hyperspace analogue to language (HAL) (Lund and Burgess 1996) that represent how the mind processes words. In these models, reading is seen as a construction of arbitrary symbols that contain meaning only when compared to other arbitrary symbols. For example, the word dog is arbitrarily assigned to the physical animal that we call dog. We understand what a dog is solely by differentiating it from other animals, such as cats or fish, which are represented by other arbitrary words.

The main advantage of such models is that they can be easily implemented in machine learning. LSA and HAL can take the same process used to explain how computers analyze symbols and use it to explain how the mind reads. Landauer and Dumais (1997) have shown, for example, that patterns produced by LSA approximate the various learning outcomes of school age children. It is important to note that these com-

puter models achieve these results without any perceptual awareness. Although some would suggest that this is evidence that reading comprehension does not require perceptual awareness, others would argue that computer models like these lack perceptual grounding, and thus cannot accurately represent human learning (Glenberg and Robertson 2000; Lakoff and Johnson 1999).

To address this problem, other researchers have developed explanations that assume a direct connection to perceptual experience. Leading among these theories is Glenberg's indexical hypothesis (IH) (Glenberg 1997; Glenberg et al. 2004). IH is a combination of three processes: relating words to corresponding objects, giving affordances to these objects, and combining these affordances according to syntax. It builds on the idea of mental models (Johnson-Laird 1983), or situation models (van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). Mental models of reading comprehension suggest that readers construct situational models of text rather than a textual model. These situational models are text-specific; such as, "Joe played soccer on Saturday." Readers create a token in their mind that represents Joe and then process the information about his day in accordance with this token. Mental models are vital for readers to relate information across sentences, comprehend information similarly across modalities, and explain differences in comprehension based on previous domain knowledge (Zwaan and Radvansky 1998; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983).

Glenberg's IH emphasizes the role of physical actions and object affordances in making these mental models. Affordances are the abilities that we give to an object (Gibson 1977). For example, a couch has the affordance of sitting while a TV does not have the affordance of sitting. We can sit on a couch, but we do not typically sit on a TV. The affordances of an object can differ depending on the object and also on the organism

using the object. For example, a high chair may have the affordance of sitting for a child but not for an adult. These affordances allow readers to connect words to reality.

Current research on perception and motion supports the IH by showing that asking readers to manipulate objects that represent nouns increases reading comprehension (Glenberg, Brown, and Levin 2007; Glenberg et al. 2004). The idea is that manipulatives are a concrete instantiation of a mental model and thus allow readers to connect the text to a mental model that represents perceptual experience. This permits them to better understand what the object is and what affordances it can be given. For example, Glenberg et al. (2004) instructed first- and second-grade students to enact the events in a narrative text by manipulating objects. That is, if the text stated that the tractor drove to the barn, the child would be asked to move the tractor to the barn. Compared to the children in the reread condition, children in the manipulation condition had higher reading comprehension scores.

The same effect was obtained in a subsequent study for which students worked in groups of three and took turns manipulating the objects while reading (Glenberg, Brown, and Levin 2007). As before, the manipulation group outperformed the reread group on a test comprised of comprehension questions.

The Glenberg et al. (2004; 2007) studies provide strong evidence for the IH. The research suggests that perception and action play an important role in creating the mental models that support reading comprehension. However, the IH does not specify the mechanisms that connect physical actions, object affordances, and mental models. To answer this question, we must look at theories such as structure mapping, symbol grounding, and embodied mind. Structure mapping is the theory of analogies in which humans compare objects and notice similarities (Gentner 1983). The process works by aligning one object or idea with another along all the range of possible dimensions. For example, one could compare a flower to a tree by aligning them in terms of size, shape, color, location, parts, and so forth. In structure mapping, the more points of alignment there are, the more likely people are to notice commonalities and form coherent categories. For this reason, mappings that involve richly detailed objects are thought to be better than those involving sparse or abstract objects.

Several current symbol grounding theories state that perception and action become tied to cognition via associations and metaphoric reference (Barsalou 1999; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). These theories also support the idea that rich objects are more effective for mapping than sparse objects because rich objects provide more opportunities for association.

Embodied mind theories emphasize the importance of the body's experience with the world—that is, that perception and physical experience cannot be separated. One of the main components of embodied mind theories is the notion that humans use the environment to release cognitive load (Wilson 2002). The theory states that humans release as much information into the environment as possible and only refer to it when that information becomes necessary. This allows them to increase their processing ability, such as working memory.

This rationale suggests that richly detailed objects would be more effective for learning than sparse objects, because rich objects allow us to relieve more of our cognitive load into the environment.

The objects in Glenberg et al. (2004; 2007) were rich in detail—for example, a tractor represented by a toy tractor. Research suggests that rich objects can be useful for learning, as long as they include relevant information (Goldstone and Sakamoto 2003). Goldstone and Sakamoto studied pattern learning in undergraduate students. Students completed a computer simulation requiring them to learn a pattern to solve a problem. More specifically, they had to alter conditions in an environment to move ants to food. The concrete condition participants were then required to apply the pattern to letters, and the abstract condition participants applied it to abstract, pixilated pictures. Participants in the concrete simulation were better able to learn the pattern than participants in the abstract simulation. The researchers attributed this to the effectiveness of the concrete simulation in helping students to understand the pattern. Objects that are rich in detail allow students to make more comparisons because there are more points of reference available to compare (Gentner and Gunn 2001). This is in alignment with mental model theories and Glenberg's IH. The detailed objects in the Glenberg et al. (2004; 2007) studies allowed the students to compare the object with their own mental image on many different points of alignment, therefore building a strong similarity between the object and their

image. With a strong similarity established, the students could rely on the object rather than their mental representations. This allowed the students to place some of their cognitive load onto the object and focus on other aspects of the story, such as spatial and temporal information.

However, some research also suggests a downside to using manipulatives that are rich in detail. There is evidence indicating that rich objects can be too distracting (DeLoache and Sharon 2005) and that they hinder abstract learning, which affects transferability (Kaminski, Sloutsky, and Heckler 2008). Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that sparse objects are often more effective as learning aides than rich objects are (Sloutsky, Kaminski, and Heckler 2005; Son, Smith, and Goldstone 2008). For example, undergraduate students learned science and math concepts better when taught with perceptually sparse symbols (such as a small, black star) versus a perceptually rich object (such as an ornate chalice). In fact, the perceptually rich symbols actually hindered learning. The importance of having abstract representations has also been linked to vocabulary learning in toddlers (Son, Smith, and Goldstone 2008). Toddlers in this study were able to generalize object shapes better when they learned using sparse models rather than complex ones.

Although both rich and sparse models have been found to be effective in varying situations, the question remains as to which works best for increasing reading comprehension. This question, while controversial, has not yet been asked in a narrative text situation such as in this study. Sloutsky, Kaminski, and Heckler (2005) argue for sparse objects, claiming that details have the ability to provide students with irrelevant information and hence are distracting. Sparse objects require students to generate their own mental image, and self-generation is a technique that has been shown to increase recall (Mulligan and Lozito 2004).

The present study tests whether either rich or sparse objects give an advantage related to reading comprehension.

## Methods

**Participants:** Parental consent was obtained for seventy-two second-grade students in school districts around East Lansing, Michigan. Children were placed into groups of three, based on convenience—i.e., stu-

dents who attended the same class were grouped together. Within each classroom, the students were randomly placed into groups of three, and each group of three was randomly assigned to a condition. After conditions had been assigned, four students dropped out, for a final total of sixty-eight participants.

## Materials

There were two sets of rich objects and two sets of sparse objects, each of which depicted either a farm or house scenario (figures 1 and 2). The rich manipulatives were Fisher-Price toys. The sparse manipulatives were constructed from Styrofoam, paper, and cardboard.

Each scenario was paired with one practice text, four experimental texts, and two ten-question tests. The stories, scenarios, and questions were adapted from Glenberg, Brown, and Levin (2007). Each story was seven or eight sentences long, and contained five action sentences. This is one of the experimental texts from the house scenario stories, entitled “Time for Bed”:

It is bedtime at the Smith house.  
Kate is in her crib, and Andy is reading in the living room.  
Rosa walks to the bathroom.  
She gets in the bathtub.  
Andy walks to the bedroom.  
He kisses Kate good night.  
He goes to bed.  
Rosa will go to bed later.



**Figure 1:** Shows the manipulatives used in a farm scenario under the rich condition.

At the end of each action sentence, a green light indicated that some action was required by the participant. This action varied based on condition.

Five questions accompanied each story, and these were also adapted from Glenberg, Brown, and Levin (2007). The questions that accompanied the preceding story:

- Did Rosa and Kate go to the bathroom?
- Did Rosa get in the bathtub?
- Did Andy walk to the bedroom?
- Did Rosa kiss Kate good night?
- Did Andy get in the bathtub?

**Design:** The design was a counterbalanced experimental-control method, with two levels of experimental condition: rich and sparse. The independent variable was the level of detail of the objects being manipulated. The dependent variable was the individual's overall score on a series of four comprehension tests. To ensure that there were no order effects with the stories, the stories were administered in various orders, and two different story scenarios were included. For example, a group of students in the sparse condition–farm scenario would read four farm stories in the order A, B, C, D. Another group of students in the sparse condition–farm scenario would read four farm stories in the order C, B, A, D. Likewise, a group of students in the sparse condition–house scenario would read four house stories in the order E, F, G, H; and another sparse condition–house scenario group would read the four house stories in the order G, E, H, F. This counterbalancing occurred in all three conditions and across both story scenarios.

**Procedure:** Children were divided into groups of three that were randomly divided into three conditions: a rich manipulative group, a sparse manipulative group, and a reread group. There were two possible story scenarios that the groups were randomly placed in: a farm scenario and a house scenario. Each scenario contained one practice text and four experimental texts. The experiment took place over the course of two days. Both days were identical, with the exception that on the first day the experimenter familiarized students with the manipulatives and provided instructions on how to read the stories. Students practiced the instructions with the practice text during both sessions. The same practice text was used both times, since students did not need to relearn the procedure but rather just needed a reminder. No student seemed to have diffi-



**Figure 2:** Shows the manipulatives used in a farm scenario under the sparse condition.

culty remembering directions. After the practice session, students read two experimental texts. They took turns reading, one student per sentence. The manipulative groups were instructed to move the manipulatives in accordance with the story each time there was a green light following their sentence, which indicated that it was an action sentence. For example, if the sentence stated, “Andy walks to the bedroom,” the reader would take Andy and move him to the bedroom while the other students watched. The reread group reread the sentences that were followed by green lights and then answered a question regarding the sentence. For example, student 1 would read the sentence “Rosa picks up Kate” and then reread the same sentence. The experimenter would then ask, “Who picked up Kate?” and students 1, 2, or 3 could answer the question. The experimenter ensured that each student in the group participated in answering questions. Although the questions may have helped reinforce the story, and therefore give an advantage to the reread condition, this is a conservative advantage in respect to prior research. Furthermore, the reread group has been included to ensure replication of the Glenberg, Brown, and Levin (2007) article, and the focus of the current study is the difference between rich and sparse conditions. At the end of each story, the reread group was allowed to play with a carnival scenario without guided instruction to balance the amount of time spent with the toys between the manipulative and reread groups. Students from all groups were asked ten comprehension questions after they had completed both experimental texts. These questions were read in order; students answered five questions about the first story they read, followed by five questions about the second story they read. Students were explicitly told which story they were

being asked about prior to each set of questions. All questions were read out loud, and students answered individually. The answers were forced choice, with the option for the child to either circle yes or no. The children were either spaced out or separated by dividers to prevent cheating.

## Results

The total scores among the three conditions were analyzed in a one-way analysis of variance, with condition as the independent variable (rich manipulatives, sparse manipulative, or reread) and total test score as the dependent variable. These total scores were measured per individual student and included both sets of ten questions that the students were given (for a total of twenty questions per student). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant difference ( $F(2,67) = 10.31, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.24$ ) between groups, with the sparse group having the highest score, the rich group having the second highest, and the reread group having the lowest (table 1). An independent samples t-test revealed that the sparse group significantly outperformed the reread group ( $t(34) = -4.35, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.29$ ) as did the rich group ( $t(44) = -2.81, p = 0.007, \eta^2 = 0.15$ ). The difference between the rich and sparse groups was not significant ( $t(42) = -1.46, p = 0.15, \eta^2 = 0.05$ ). However, there was indirect evidence of a difference between the rich and sparse conditions in that the effect size for the objects' advantage over the reread condition was larger for sparse objects than for rich objects (0.29 vs. 0.15).

## Discussion

Both manipulative groups had significantly higher scores than the reread group. An important feature of the findings is the successful replication of previous manipulative research. By reproducing the results of Glenberg, Brown, and Levin (2007), we strengthen the evidence for the effectiveness of manipulatives. The replication also gives us confidence in the validity of the study. The results also provide support for

the IH. Students performed better when they were able to physically relate words to objects and then manipulate these objects in a way that aligned with their syntactical expectations. This is in accordance with the IH.

These results are also important because they lend further support to the relationship between manipulatives and reading comprehension. This relationship supports mental model theories, which state that readers create situational images of text while they read (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Zwaan and Radvansky 1998; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). Manipulatives support mental model theories by showing that utilizing these models leads to increased comprehension. The data also support embodied mind and symbol grounding theories (Barsalou 1999; Lakoff and Johnson 1999) by showing that perception and action play an important role in reading comprehension.

What is unique about this study is that the researchers were able to improve comprehension by using manipulative strategies, suggesting that helping students create a mental model by providing physical structures helped to increase their comprehension. If this is true, then it is also possible that there is a directional relationship between mental model construction and reading comprehension. Perhaps the ability for a child to create mental models has an impact on how well they comprehend, rather than comprehension abilities affecting the ability to create a mental model. However, one should take caution when claiming directionality; more research needs to be done in order to support this hypothesis.

This study aimed at going one step deeper than the Glenberg, Brown and Levin (2007) study by investigating the cognitive processes that occur when children relate words to objects. There was no significant difference between cognitive processes in rich and sparse conditions. This suggests that the amount of detail in manipulatives has no effect on reading comprehension. These results conflict with previous theories such as structure mapping, which states that a higher number of points of alignment are advantageous for learning (Gentner and Gunn 2001). It also somewhat conflicts with embodied mind theories, which suggest that the ability to relieve cognitive load allows for an increase in working memory processing (Wilson 2002).

The results suggest that detail does not affect comprehension, so perhaps the action of moving the

**Table 1:** Results of Comprehension Assessment  
(Out of 20 Questions)

Condition	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Control	24	14.46	2.87
Rich	22	16.55	2.06
Sparse	22	17.32	1.39

manipulatives is what makes manipulatives effective. Previous research has shown that physical action plays an important role in memory. One study showed that asking students to make hand gestures while learning math problems significantly improved their recall of the math problems later on (Broaders et al. 2007). Another study showed that making gestures during speech enabled participants to remember more information than participants did who made no gestures (Cook, Yip, and Goldin-Meadow 2010). If it is the physical act of moving manipulatives that increases comprehension, future research should focus on the specific factors that make this movement effective in order to better understand how reading manipulatives function.

Although there was no significant difference between reading comprehension in the rich and sparse conditions, the difference in effect sizes is worth discussing. This difference may suggest that there are two different processes occurring when students are presented with rich versus sparse manipulatives. Previous research shows significant differences favoring both rich (Gentner and Gunn 2001; Goldstone and Sakamoto 2003) and sparse (Sloutsky and Fisher 2004; Son, Smith, and Goldstone 2008) manipulatives. The existing sparse object research is primarily concerned with the transfer of knowledge, such as math concepts (Sloutsky, Kaminski, and Heckler 2005) or object categorization (Son, Smith, and Goldstone 2008). However, the current study shows that the value of sparse objects is not limited to transfer of knowledge, as the students did not need to apply the stories to other situations.

So what separates the concepts of rich and sparse, and how do we know when to use each one? One possible explanation is the differences in the type of learning that is occurring. In the Goldstone and Sakamoto (2003) study, participants learned from a training experience and then answered questions about different strategies used in the training. There was no rote memorization necessary, because the participants were answering from experience. The participants gained experiential knowledge about a concept rather than memorizing a fact. Previous research suggests that rich manipulatives work because of their ability to relieve cognitive load. This relief opens up working memory in order for students to learn concepts. The rich objects may have provided an advantage over the sparse objects in Goldstone and Sakamoto because the task required them to learn

concepts and the rich manipulatives provided them with the cognitive space to do so. The current study, along with Sloutsky et al. (2005) and Son, Smith, and Goldstone (2008), required some form of memorization rather than only learning a concept. Being able to generate an image is linked to memory, and previous research has shown that adults given a rote memorization test are more likely to remember self-generated words than read words (Watkins and Sechler 1988). Therefore, participants in the current study were at the greatest advantage when they used their generation skills, something that only occurred in the sparse manipulatives condition.

Although the current study failed to reveal a difference between rich and sparse objects in relation to reading comprehension, it is possible that such a difference exists. Future studies could probe further by adding more participants or types of comprehension. It is also important to examine the role of manipulatives in memorization versus experiential learning. Understanding how these processes work will give better understanding of how comprehension works and how it is linked to mental models. ♡

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# A History of the Professorial Assistantship Program

Craig Pearson | Biochemistry and English

Cultivating the high-performing student has long been an aspiration priority at MSU. The university seeks not only to attract these students from around the country and even across the globe, but to provide them once they're here with opportunities to explore and expand their diverse range of interests. The Professorial Assistantship (PA) program, established by the Honors College in 1978 with just twenty students, creates such opportunities by pairing top freshmen recruits with faculty mentors for a two-year research experience (Lammers 1985). The typical PA works eight to ten hours a week, with a stipend of approximately \$2,500 for the academic year. Beyond that, the only "typical" element of the PA experience is an intense, gratifying dedication to the topic of study.

Even before the PA program came into being, the Honors College provided unique experiences for motivated students. The Honors College itself was established in 1956 as a pioneering effort to em-

brace exceptional undergraduates in all fields of study. It officially began operations in the fall of 1957, with about three hundred students. A 1958 statement from the Department of Information Services press release called them "superior students" who were "not afraid to risk an 'egghead' label by accepting admission into the Honors College" (1958). Nor were they afraid to dive headfirst into academic research. The first honors course in general chemistry included an independent project on a student-selected topic, which involved open laboratory time and one-on-one faculty guidance.

It was a groundbreaking educational experiment at the time, and, as noted by its supervising professor Dr. Robert Hammer in a 1959 piece from the Michigan State University Magazine, its students were pushed to the highest level of excellence. "They are accustomed to being the largest frogs in their respective ponds," wrote Dr. Hammer. "But when they enter this course, they find that all the frogs in the new pond are large." Regarding the research component of the course, he explained, "We try to give the student a first-hand notion of what research is like by asking him to carry out an investigation. In it he is required to discover a fact which he could not learn by any other means than experimentation" (Hammer 1959, 11). The success of this chemistry course was a discovery in its own right, and the course paved the way for a greater focus on undergraduate research in the years to come.

It wasn't until 1978, however, that the first twenty PAs were awarded, with the goal of increasing the enrollment rate among participants in the Alumni Distinguished Scholarship (ADS) competition (Lammers 1985). As the program developed, its objectives expanded: PAs became an essential recruiting tool as well as a means to tap the potential of the university's brightest young scholars. In 1984, assistantships were made available to "No Pref" majors for the first time, the tie-in with ADS was dropped, and the criteria for consideration were made more selective. As mentioned by an internal Honors College memo at the time, "For the prime target group and their parents,



*Courtesy of Honors College Archive*



*Courtesy of Honors College Archive*

the attraction of special awards tends to rise in proportion to their selectivity” (1985), with the same relationship being noted for potentially supportive faculty. To accommodate more of this exceptional group, the program accordingly increased the number of PAs to approximately twenty-five per freshman class. The same document commented, “In the near term, we doubt whether the University would have the absorptive capacity (in the form of highly attentive, effective and well-matched mentors) to provide a truly outstanding experience for more than 50 of these young people at one time” (1995). However, the frogs continued to multiply.

About a decade later, the program more than doubled. A mid-1990s Honors College review proposed not only increasing the number of PAs but also awarding the positions earlier in the admission process to entice top recruits away from competing universities. In 2006, the program expanded to its current size, with a cap of two hundred freshmen per year—a limit that has been approached with each successive class since then.

Over the past several decades, dozens of PA pamphlets have highlighted the fascinating projects undertaken by undergraduates. Students have analyzed ten-thousand-year-old ostrich egg fragments, produced programs for public television stations, and improved the mechanical strength of concrete.

The academic climate today is in many ways different from that in which the PA program was born more than thirty years ago. One needs only to compare the textbook from the first honors chemistry course to the text used today. Immeasurable strides have been made in all areas of research—many of them, in fact, by graduates who were once Profes-

sorial Assistants. The “high-performing student” at MSU remains very much the same, however: talented, motivated, and capable of great discoveries. The only difference is that now, through the Honors College and the PA program, they have more opportunities than ever before. ♡

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# About the Contributors

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## Clara Balliet



Clara J. Balliet is a third-year student from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and is the author of “African-American Vernacular Dance: Identity, Community, Intervention.” She is in the College of Arts and Humanities and is studying Chinese. Some of her favorite activities on campus include be-

ing a resident mentor in Mason-Abbot, contra dance, and late-night discussion on ethics, politics, and the meaning of life.

Clara began her research during an inspiring brainstorm session in a class on pop culture and social movements. Her mentor for the project was Dr. Austin Jackson, a professor in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities. “I was inspired by my love of dance,” says Clara. “We can learn a lot about the world just by exploring the connections dancers have with the music, other dancers, and their own bodies.”

## Milan Griffes



Milan D. Griffes is a sophomore history major from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the author of “Michigan State University’s Involvement with the South Vietnamese Civil Guard.” This project started as the final paper for his historical methods course with Dr. Charles Keith. With Dr.

Keith’s advice and the help of the MSU archives staff, Milan put his many hours in the archives to good use to create his article.

Milan is currently in his second year of a Professorial Assistantship with Dr. Denise Demetriou, working on Greco-Phoenician and Greco-Persian relations. “My PA with Professor Demetriou has been a great introduction to academic research and the community of classical studies,” he says.

## Elizabeth Cook



Elizabeth Cook is the author of “Comparing Rich and Sparse Manipulatives in Narrative Comprehension in Second Graders.” From Wayland, Michigan, Elizabeth has bachelor’s degrees in psychology and Spanish from MSU and has just finished her first year as a PhD student in MSU’s

school psychology program. During her undergraduate time at MSU, she was a member of the Honors College, Mortar Board, and Psi Chi. She volunteered for the Honors Times Two program and America Reads initiative. Elizabeth also worked in the Cognitive Development Lab in the College of Education and studied in Santander, Spain, during the summer of 2010.

Elizabeth worked with Dr. Kelly Mix on her project. “I was interested in looking at literacy skills in elementary students,” says Elizabeth. “The lab I was working in was researching how math manipulatives affect learning, so I transferred this idea to literacy.”

## Qinge Wu



Qinge Wu is a junior studying creative advertising and specializing in design from Guangzhou, China. She is the creator of Finding the Green. Qinge is a member of the Honors College, a graphic designer at the Chinese Undergraduate Student Association, and an intern at both Message

Makers and TechSmith.

The inspiration behind Finding the Green grew out of the high rises of San Francisco. Tired of the busy city and concrete buildings, Qinge set out to find nature in the most unlikely of places. “Finding the green means finding your happiness,” says Qinge. “Find the green, and fill your world with it.”

## Aubrey Owada



Aubrey E. Owada is a junior from Olympia, Washington, and the artist of *Slithering in Space*. She is studying apparel and textile design and global area studies, with a specialization in international development and a minor in Spanish.

In her free time at MSU, Aubrey participates in undergraduate research initiatives and the annual juried Apparel and Textile Design Fashion Show. She has also competed in national textile design competitions, of which she has won two. Aubrey continues to display art in juried exhibitions in the MSU Kresge Art Museum. She has volunteered at and taken leadership positions in the Honors College, Pi Beta Phi sorority, MSU Spartan Global Development Fund, and MSU Global Youth for Education and Change. Aubrey studied abroad in the “Community Engagement and Interdisciplinary Studies in the Peruvian Andes” program to learn Spanish and intern with a nonprofit organization.

## Craig Pearson



Craig Pearson is the author of “Walking Backwards.” An Honors College sophomore from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Pearson plans to graduate in 2014 with degrees in biochemistry and molecular biology and English. In addition to creative writing, he is heavily involved in undergraduate

research as well as being active in the MSU neuroscience and biochemistry clubs and writing for the State News. He was also named a 2012 Goldwater scholar (see p. 26).

Craig completed “Walking Backwards” as part of an independent study with Professor Bill Penn. Of his inspiration, Pearson says: “I wanted to write about how the past interacts with the present, and how the course of our relationships can often be predetermined by events outside of our control. The story is about the realizations that work their way to the surface as we move from childhood to adulthood.”

## More Highlights of Undergraduate Literature

### Children’s Understanding Of Emotional Influences On Others’ Behavior

Meghan Kanya and Dr. Judith Danovitch examined how, if at all, children understand that emotional states influence cognitive processes. Participants aged five to ten were asked to think about their experience with a set of emotions and then completed tasks involving fictional characters with these emotional states. The researchers found a potential relationship between age and the ability to cite emotions as explanations for certain behaviors.

Kanya, M., and Danovitch, J., Children’s Understanding of Emotional Influences on Others’ Behavior, Cognitive Development Society, Philadelphia, PA, 14–15 October 2011.

### You Must Be as Tall as This Line to Ride the Roller Coaster: “Exactly” Readings of “As”-Comparatives

Kara Brewer and Katrina Torgerson were part of a group that presented results from two experiments demonstrating that children behave similarly to adults in treating “as”-comparatives as meaning “exactly equal to,” results consistent with a previous study that showed that children treat numerals as meaning “exactly n” rather than “at least n.” This is shown to be incompatible with accounts treating the “exactly” readings of “as”-comparatives as scalar implicatures. Rather, this study’s data provide evidence that “as”-comparatives, like numerals, have “exactly” meanings.

Munn, A., Ayers, K., Brewer, K., Torgerson, K., and Schmitt, C., You Must Be as Tall as This Line to Ride the Roller Coaster: “Exactly” Readings of “As”-Comparatives, Boston University Conference on Language Development, Boston, MA, 4–6 November, 2011.

### Feelin’ Blue About the Ol’ Switcheroo: Depression Exacerbates Performance Decrements After S-R Reversals

Hans S. Schroder worked with Dr. Jason Moser to examine the effects of depression on performance after stimulus-response (S-R) reversals. Participants in the study completed a task in which S-R mappings were reversed between blocks, creating proactive interference in the postreversal blocks. The results showed that depressed individuals exhibited poorer posterror accuracy in these more difficult postreversal blocks. The study noted that depression-related behavioral differences may be restricted to cognitively demanding tasks.

Schroder, H., and Moser, J., Feelin’ Blue about the Ol’ Switcheroo: Depression Exacerbates Performance Decrements after S-R Reversals, Association for Psychological Science, Chicago, IL, 24–27 May 2012.

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