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Issue on "Identity and Dialogue"

Edited by

Gerald Cipriani

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Yang Shan asked San Sheng, "What is your name?"
San Sheng said, "Hui Chi."
Yang Shan said, "Hui Chi is me."
San Sheng said, "My name is Hui Jan."
Yang Shan laughed aloud.

Pi Yen Lu

(The Blue Cliff Record)

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Volume 3 Number 2 of *Culture and Dialogue* focuses on the theme of "identity and dialogue." The question of identity formation is a very sensitive one, very often because it is misunderstood or intentionally misused. The idea of identity is too frequently used as a political weapon for cultural domination. In other circumstances, however, it can simply be a means for recognition and therefore for survival under the threat of the dominant culture. Thus, the difficult question is not so much *What is identity?* but rather *What should we do with identity? Or, to put it in more philosophical terms, Shouldn't questions appertaining to the metaphysics of identity give way to questions about its ethical condition?* In a sense, identity is no more than a device that enables us to come close to perceiving the unperceivable, the in-itself of things, or, simply, the inner self. We assume that this perceptual device is as *identical* as one can possibly imagine to the inner nature of things or the inner self of persons. Hence, the too often misguided argument against any attempt to work out what identity is: as inner selves and things in-themselves cannot be grasped since they are no more than forms of motivation, desire, or will – the argument goes – it is pointless to seek to pin identity down. Still, if identity amounts indeed to no more than wrapped up emptiness, life without identity amounts to emptiness without form – in other words, meaninglessness. There is no inner nature of identity, only lenses that enable us to see more clearly what is in-itself blurred or unsubstantial, what is felt as density or dilation, or, even further, emptiness. In actual facts, the only possible *in-itself* is emptiness, and human beings have found different ways to handle the matter. The worst-case scenario shows individuals, groups, or even nations impose their own lenses onto others to be seen more clearly, or simply for everyone to identify the same thing. The alleged wonders of cultural identity *as such* for the sake of particularity, homogeneity, or communicative harmony become the will to power at work, thus ignoring the mutually enriching relational dynamics between Self and Otherness. This is where metaphysics becomes irrelevant and gives way to ethics. To use cultural identity as a means for an end is always the symptom of an unbalance between differences. Opulence and survival become, in this case, the two poles of the struggle for identity – the latter very often ensuing from the former. In any respect, what human beings have been capable of in the course of history for the sake of identity is quite baffling. The drive has been either to achieve sameness, or else to preserve uniqueness – in many cases with destructive effects. There is no meaningful life without identity, but unless we understand that the existence of identities depends on our ability and willingness to be renewed from each other, in dialogue, there will be coercion, intolerance and conflicts. Needless to say, this dialogical *way* needs time to be learned and practised, an increasing challenge for all of us in a techno-world where speed and forgetfulness leave little room for memory, protension, and therefore attentiveness.

This number of *Culture and Dialogue* brings together a variety of essays addressing issues of identity with concrete examples and from different perspectives, be they art, philosophy, politics, religion, gender, or ethnic studies. All essays describe and question

the *relational* element at work in identity formation within different cultural contexts, such as Japan, America, Corsica, Mongolia, Norway, Australia, Italy, and Ireland. Hiroshi Yoshioka offers a topical critique of what lays behind the fashionable self-portrait of Japanese cultural identity as *Cool Japan* in all its uniqueness. Sandra Wawrytko addresses the sensitive issue of gun culture in American identity by resorting to Mahāyāna Buddhist conceptions of failed interconnectedness. Dominique Verdoni discusses cultural identity formation with particular reference to the Corsican language and literature against the background of more dominant or regulating cultures. Angelika Böck shows how art practice can disclose the processes involved in any attempts to represent otherness, including when different groups such as Mongolian herders, Sami singers, and Australian Aboriginal hunters use other cultural codes and perspectives. Francesca Pierini critically reflects upon culturally biased ways Anglo-American literature has traditionally portrayed Italian culture – an orientalised imagined identity. The selection of essays closes with Hannah Hale's study on a very specific aspect of gender identity formation: how eating and drinking habits shape the development of masculinities within a community of students. All essays, in one way or another, disclose how identity formation is conditioned by, or emerges from, relationships between self and otherness, inside and outside, or minor and dominant cultures. As paradoxical as it may seem, the more we relate to each other the more identity becomes an issue.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this number on identity and dialogue for the richness of their interpretations and for the variety of perspectives they have brought in. I am also grateful for their responsiveness and reliability, two increasingly rarefied human characteristics. Furthermore, the Journal is pleased to welcome our new Assistant Editors, Loni Reynolds and David Beirne, as well as our new Copy Editor, Rachel Coventry. As the Journal grows in strength and size more support is naturally needed; our new editors have kindly accepted to offer their help, thus adding to the precious expertise that our existing Editorial Assistant, Jon Shaw, is already providing. The work that our editorial team as a whole has already achieved for this particular number – whether in the form of critical comments, suggestions, corrections, or formatting – can only be praised.

Gerald Cipriani

AFTER "COOL JAPAN": A STUDY ON CULTURAL NATIONALISM

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Abstract

What is the meaning of "Japanese" culture? In earlier ages, it was about temples, *Noh* plays, *Kabuki*, *Utamaro* and *Wabi-sabi*. These traditional icons have, since the Meiji era (1868-1912), been identified as typically Japanese. Are they, however, still relevant today? Has there been any crucial mutation in the cultural identity of Japan? In the contemporary era, more and more people associate Japanese culture with Manga, animation and video games, in other words with cultural developments of the post-World War II era. The Japanese Government has actively promoted the popularity of these new aspects of Japanese culture as evidenced in their eagerness to adopt the expression "Cool Japan," inspired by its British predecessor's "Cool Britannia." Everyone does not share that perception though. Following the 11th March 2011 series of disasters, Japanese artist Tadasu Takamine (1968-) worked on a critical questioning of Japanese society and culture, culminating in a work titled *Tadasu Takamine's Cool* Japan that was shown at the Art Tower Mito, in Ibaraki Prefecture (2012). The present essay reflects on and develops further the message conveyed by Takamine about contemporary Japanese cultural identity.

I

Opening

In our relentlessly globalizing world, the question of identity has come to take a more complex form than ever before. Today, it is not clear by which standard one can define one's own identity in any significant sense. Compared to race, ethnicity, religion, sex, social group or nationality, which are supposed to be physically or institutionally more or less fixed, culture seems to be relatively unsettled with increasingly multiple factors at work when it comes to recognizing our own cultural identity. This unsettlement leads us to question of how we identify a culture: the issue of our cultural identity cannot be separated from that of the identity of a culture.

The same question applies as to what "Japanese" culture actually is. In earlier ages, it was about the Imperial Palace, the tale of Genji, Buddhist Temples, Noh plays, Kabuki, Utamaro and Wabi-sabi – all stereotyped images used by the tourist industry. These traditional icons have since the Meiji era (1868-1912) been identified as typically Japanese, and the paradigmatic connections between these cultural items and the essence of Japanese identity have been favored if not enforced by both in Japan and people in the West. However, is such a conception of Japanese identity still relevant today? Moreover, has there been any crucial mutation in the cultural identity of Japan?

Indeed, more and more people tend to associate nowadays Japanese culture with Manga, animation and video games, in other words with cultural developments of the post-World War II era. The Japanese Government have since been very eager to promote the popularity of these new aspects of Japanese culture; they have even used the expression "Cool Japan," inspired by its British predecessor's "Cool Britannia." Forty to fifty years ago, most Japanese manga and animation were simply regarded as junk or sub-cultural forms of expression, and people actually worried about the bad influence on children. Still, as soon as Japanese manga and animation gained intentional popularity the government suddenly discovered their importance as an industry.

This recent development of Japanese "national" culture came to my attention as an issue in March 2011, when I started to chair the International Convention on Manga, Animation, Games and Media Art (ICOMAG).[1] Contrary to what its name may suggest, the aim of the Convention was not to promote those new forms of Japanese culture, but to stimulate a critical and theoretical debate about their place in the art world. It was obvious that the idea of "Cool Japan" was – and still is – politically biased, albeit used in an astonishingly naive way without any serious critique.

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[1] ICOMAG, the International Convention on Manga, Animation, Game and Media Art (*Sekai Media Geijutsu Convention* 世界メディア芸術コンベンション), is an annual assembly organized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkacho* 文化庁) to discuss the social and theoretical background of Japan Media Arts Festival (*Media Geijutsusai* メディア芸術祭). One issue that struck me as misleading was the Japanese title, which, unlike the English equivalent, did not give any indication of concern with popular culture such as manga, animation and games. This inconsistency was discussed on the occasion of the 2011 Convention, as it might lead to addressing important questions of basic understanding of art and culture in modern Japan. Full ICOMAG proceedings available at http://www.bunka.go.jp/geijutsu_bunka/04media_geijutsusai/

Not everyone has followed the tide though. Following the 11th March 2011 series of disasters Japanese artist Tadasu Takamine (1968-) worked on a critical questioning of Japanese society and culture, culminating in a work titled *Tadasu Takamine's Cool* Japan that was shown at the Art Tower Mito, in Ibaraki Prefecture (2012). Being invited to submit a text for the catalogue of his exhibition gave me the opportunity to put "Cool Japan" as symbol of contemporary Japanese cultural identity and nationalism under critical scrutiny. The idea behind the text was to signpost "Cool Japan, Cool Down."[2]

II

Cool Japan, Cool Down

"Cool Japan" is an umbrella term for the phenomenon of the international popularity of Japanese contemporary culture, in particular that of manga, anime, computer games, music and other fields of cultural production related to Japanese youth culture, although in a broad sense it also contains Japanese culture in general, including traditional performing arts, crafts, cuisine and so on. Mimicking the "Cool Britannia" of the late 1990s, the term is being promoted and developed by the Japanese government as a model for content production that offers an alternative to the model of economic growth based on industrial manufacturing.

The idea of "Cool Japan" started to become an issue around ten years ago,[3] but more recently the situation seems to have taken a turn for the worse. Talking about it this way, Cool Japan probably sounds as though it was just a fad. Actually, there are probably quite a few people who really think it is just that, no more than a fad. Is that really the case? Arguably not. Cool Japan can be thought of as one guise of a long drawn-out problem at the heart of postwar Japanese culture, which has never been seriously discussed. It is as though what we have been unconsciously avoiding, for a few generations at least, has like some ideological IOU finally come around. Yet it seems that in itself the situation is not bad at all.

Behind the phenomenon that takes the form of Cool Japan lies hidden an important question. Namely, how should we deal with "nationalism in the form of culture"? If it were nationalism as a political position, its expression would still be rather straightforward. But in the case of nationalism that appears as culture, what then? How do we deal with that? And what does it mean for political ideology to "appear as culture"?

In Japan, many of us have been instilled with the firm belief that culture is (or at least should be) free from politics. At school we are all taught that literature, art and music are a matter of "our self-expression"; we are not trained in approaches to discussion that

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[2] "Cool Japan, Cool Down" is the title of a text that first appeared in *Tadasu Takamine's Cool Japan* (Art Tower Mito: Contemporary Art Center, 2013) and was translated from the original Japanese by Olivier Krischer. I would like to express my special thanks to the translator and Mizuki Takahashi, from Art Tower Mito, for allowing a revised version to be published in *Culture and Dialogue*.

[3] "Cool Japan" came into wide usage following Douglas MacGrey's article "Japan's Gross National Cool," in *Foreign Policy* (May-June 2002). The article's main point is that Japanese culture no longer relies on passing through the US market, having instead an increasingly global reach.

enable us to analyze the political nature of culture. On the contrary, the values we are impressed with make one almost feel that to raise political issues when discussing culture is to "sully" something pure. But when you think about it, such a set of values is quite peculiar, and biased. Education that instills such a cultural understanding is in fact nothing short of a powerful political action.

To avoid any misunderstanding: I am not saying, for example, that because postwar Japanese culture has been reduced to "peace at any price" – a term we should find alarming – under the protection of the US-Japan Security Treaty, our political awareness is low. Such an idea has already been repeated *ad nauseam*. For example, when my generation (born in the late 1950s) was young, the preceding "All Campus Joint Struggle League" generation of the late 1960s student movements always accused us of being "three no-ists" (no energy, no cares, no responsibility), or even "four no-ists" (the previous three plus "no passion"). Even now, the elderly are always going on about how, "Young people have no interest in politics nowadays." This is, however, not that important. What is questionable here is: regardless of whether one has a superficial political awareness or not, we share a kind of powerful, steadfast ideological connection.

Many of us in postwar Japan are constrained by such shared mental associations into thinking that "nationalism = right-wing." For example, even if one has studied history, and realizes that such a simplistic understanding is impossible, in order to positively grasp the nation of Japan, it is still difficult not relate on an intuitive level to right-wing stereotypes, such as *tokko-fuku* coats,[4] black propaganda trucks and blaring wartime songs. Such a naive association in fact seriously limits our imagination. True, it is important to study, and understand logic. However, in the end, unless we can intuitively free ourselves from our instilled mental associations, we will not be able to think freely; hence one of the important roles of art is to free up this intuitive level, by suggesting new associations, different to those we knew before. On the other hand, the stereotype of "nationalism = right-wing" supports another stereotype, "international progressive culture = left-wing." Needless to say, logically speaking, the latter is just as much of a gross simplification. Nevertheless, in postwar Japan such ideological associations have become difficult to avoid. Moreover, the construct of "International, progressive culture = left-wing" is supported by the ideal of an honest, liberal and progressive intellectual or cultural figure. Such a figure might be a Marxist, or at least sympathetic to Marxism, or be a supporter of excluded or oppressed minorities, yet opposed to police, the bureaucratic system and the conformist general public. They are allergic to the *Hinomaru* (日の丸, literally "circle of the sun," i.e., the Japanese national flag) and to the *Kimigayo* (君が代,"the Emperor's reign," i.e., the national anthem); they say that there is no hope for Japan as a country. It is easy for them to tend toward masochistic critique of their own nation.

Whether in terms of these two cultural associations or their oppositional structures, one is clearly left with the impression that Cool Japan has already ceased to function properly nowadays. In the face of International, progressive, left-wing culture's inability to escape from its Euro-American complex, it is indeed quite invigorating to boldly and

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[4] *Tokko-fuku* (特攻服)*,* associated with *bousouzoku* (暴走族) motorcycle gangs and "yankee" subculture, are overcoat-length jackets reminiscent of military or school uniforms, sometimes with elaborate Japanese slogans and insignia embroidered over them.

naively assert, "Japanese culture is superior!" It probably feels good. Where modernist, avant-garde high culture – such as contemporary literature, visual arts, music and so on – has been unable to break free of its Euro-American models, it is certainly pleasing to think that, for all that complexity, what the world really appreciates instead are Japan's traditional culture, popular culture and subcultures. Compared to the standard of cultural values taught in schools, it feels a bit like shouting, "Serves you right!"

People need nationalism in order to to feel confident about their own culture. During the general elections held in late 2012, when they flew the *Hinomaru* and played the *Kimigayo* anthem in Akihabara, the media started to fuss about "a swing to the right among young people." However, when you consider that otaku culture is helping to stabilize the national economy, it stands to reason that nationalism is one of the necessary attributes. Also, it seems to be effective to appeal to nationalism particularly in a period when people are down because of the economic slump and large-scale natural disasters. In November 2011, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry formed the "Public-Private Expert Panel" to gather proposals "with a view to connecting Cool Japan to the business sector." However, in these proposals, one finds that Cool Japan has simply been employed as a magical phrase to make Japan better again (i.e., put the country back on its feet), and to try to repair the damage done to brand Japan as a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11, 2011.

Ideology and politics aside, what is wrong with "making Japan better"?[5] The sort of sentiment that supports Cool Japan is understandable. At the same time, I cannot help feeling an aversion to the phrase "Cool Japan," which has kept me from politely going along with it. It is not simply because Cool Japan is a policy mainly driven by economic principles, nor is it because this strategy exploits nationalism and patriotism to its own ends. Rather, it is not an appropriate cultural expression of the kind of nationalism and patriotism with which we should be coming to terms. To put it another way, it seems that Cool Japan artfully dodges the question surrounding the kind of cultural nationalism and patriotism that has been regarded as taboo in the postwar period, which we need to confront now more than ever.

III

Japan as Exception

It was exactly a year ago that the artist Tadasu Takamine paid me a visit in my university office. He told me that he was thinking of naming his forthcoming exhibition at Art Tower Mito "Tadasu Takamine's Cool Japan" and that he had come to ask what I thought about it. My first reaction was surprise: "Tadasu Takamine's Cool Japan" sounded like a mismatch. In fact, it was a surprisingly good combination. Without thinking I chuckled, and then intuitively replied, "I think it's fine." I was, however, only half-heartedly encouraging as I could not really imagine what such an exhibition might entail. I was at the same time excited at the thought.

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[5] "Make Japan better" (*Nihon o genki ni suru* 日本を元気にする) is a slogan widely used by government agencies, advertisers and the public following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. It implies making the country healthy again, getting it back on its feet.

For some reason, Takamine seemed to think that I was deeply involved in the Japanese Government's Cool Japan policy. Indeed, I had been since 2011 the chairman of ICOMAG, organized by the government's Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkachou* 文化庁). The Convention was set up to discuss the possibility of reaching a new understanding of manga, animation, computer games and media art as "arts" (that is, media arts) held in conjunction with the Japan Media Arts Festival, which was established fifteen years ago. These genres indeed overlap with the cultural fields referred to as "Cool Japan." Yet, both the Agency for Cultural Affairs and I, personally, have distanced ourselves from that policy of strengthening Japan's soft-power by marketing "Cool Japan" branded cultural contents to the world. This is why the first ICOMAG held in March 2011 (named "The Locality and Universality of Media Arts") was also subtitled "Beyond Cool Japan."[6]

Takemine acknowledged that for him "Cool Japan" was a nauseating phrase. As noted earlier, I too had felt uncomfortable about it, so I deeply sympathized with him. Even so, uneasiness or discomfort seemed to hint at a point from which we might start to reconsider the current state of Japanese art and culture. As Takemine begun to produce his artworks for the exhibition, I felt that I also needed to think more earnestly about what "Cool Japan" really meant. In point of fact, a short article I wrote entitled "Why is Cool Japan embarrassing?" has now been accessed tens of thousands of times on my blog, making it probably the most widely read piece of writing on the site.[7]

The reason why the title of the article qualifies Cool Japan as "embarrassing" is the implicit Western perception of Japan that has been internalized in the hearts and minds of the Japanese people. The psychological mechanism that has formed the Japanese people's image of their own culture, allegedly without interruption since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, amounts to what I have called "internalized colonialism" or "self-colonization."[8] If people in Japan were quizzed by foreigners with an interest in Japanese culture, their idea of Japan would probably be the image they would have of themselves. For example, if a Westerner asked,

> *The walls of a Western house strictly separate inside from outside; but in traditional Japanese houses, the open porch (encircling the house) is neither an outside nor an inside space. Hence, in not clearly distinguishing interior and exterior, the notion of flexibility or forbearance is at the essence of Japanese culture, right?*

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[6] The second ICOMAG was entitled, "Commons of Imagination. What today's Society can Share through Manga, and Animation" (March 2012), while the third was "The possibility of Critique in Hybrid Cultures" (February 2013), both held at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Japan. Archives of these three conventions are available at: http://www.icomag.com/archive.html

[7] "Why is Cool Japan embarrassing?" was originally published in Japanese (*Cool Japan ha naze hazukashiinoka?* クールジャパンはなぜ恥ずかしいのか?) on the author's blog (Hiroshi Yoshioka, blog, hirunenotanuki, 06/03/2012). The text has also been published in French as "Pourquoi avoir honte du « Cool Japan »?" (translated by Miki Okubo, blog, hirunenotanuki, 12/02/2013).

[8] See Hiroshi Yoshioka, "Samurai and Self-colonization in Japan," in *The Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, eds. Jan N. Pieterse and Bikhu Parekh (London: Zed Publishers London, 1994).

I may have never thought about this form of identification before, but, put to me that way, I guess that I agree with the suggestion, and by doing so the "essence" of Japanese culture becomes clearer, seemingly all for the best. At the same time, though, I cannot help thinking "No, that isn't quite right." It is like if my self split into two parts. One part internalizes the Westerner's point of view in order to more clearly articulate the essence of my own culture. The other part resists the Other's gaze and seeks to escape any sense of cultural identity defined in the light of Otherness. It is as though we were split inside our selves between the cultural anthropologist and the native informant. This is of course by no means unique to Japan; all non-Western cultures, when defining their cultural traits, share this experience to a greater or lesser extent. However, the process is comparatively clearer in the case of Japan. What Japanese culture will need in the future is therefore a form of "self-decolonization."

It is true that Japan has never been colonized and has historically modernized remarkably rapidly in comparison with other East Asian countries. This has not, however, led to any internal process of self-colonization, a process by which the self would be doubled in order to adapt to modernization. Instead, Japan has produced its own cultural hybridity, not simply in the sense of mixture of elements within Japanese culture and issued from different sources, but rather in the way a single individual's cultural identity can be multilayered. For example, Japanese culture is portrayed as being infantile or childlike because the idea of *kawaii* (可愛い, cute) is a cultural value that prevails widely across generations. The importance of *kawaii* in Japanese culture, however, is not the sign of a childlike character. What *kawaii* denotes is that, within a Japanese-style sense of self-identity, even adults remain, to some extent, open to a circuit of childlike desires. Moreover, this openness to a circuit of multiple, shifting desires fundamentally contributes to the current global popularity of Japanese culture. Despite being a universal, primal aspect of our human disposition, our childlike nature is not adequately acknowledged within the Western "adult" model of modernity.

It is a mistake to think that the phenomenon of "Cool Japan" is now being accepted worldwide because it is a unique characteristic of Japanese culture. Japanese culture is accepted not because of its uniqueness but because it is part of universally shared experiences.

There is another reason to resist the expression "Cool Japan": to recognize that there is something amiss about it and therefore to stop obediently going along with it. In other words, we have to resist discourses that promote "Japanese essentialism" or even more "Japanese *cultural* essentialism." Those discourses do not actually discuss Japanese popular culture; they are discourses that support the groundless conviction that Japanese people and culture are truly unique in the world. There is a significant literature of its own that supports that view written by both Japanese and non-Japanese authors.[9] Although

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[9] Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London, 1970) and Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, (Kodansha: Tokyo, 1974) are two classical examples. So was Yukio Mishima's *Bunka Bôeiron* (文化防衛論, A Defense of Culture), written in 1969. Equally, Ezra Vogel's *Japan As Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979) was widely read among Japanese Businessmen in the early 1980s as a book that explained and encouraged Japanese post-war economic miracle. Another interesting example is Shichihei Yamamoto's *Nihonjin to Yudauajin* (日本人とユダヤ人, The Japanese and the Jews), published in 1970; the author first pretended to be the translator of a book by Isaiah Ben-Dasan, a Jewish

those publications are somehow academic, they target more general readers – especially adult men from the business sector, the "salarymen," office employees and managers.

Of course, we all feel to a greater or lesser extent that our own ethnicity or culture is special. However, the problem of the discourse of "Japanese exceptionalism" is that the idea of one's uniqueness can reach grotesque proportions. There was, for example, that odd idea of the 1980s according to which the intestines of Japanese people were longer than those of Westerners. This idea was used as one of the pretexts to resist the pressure from the liberalization of US beef imports; Japanese people's intestines were thought to be better suited for digesting vegetables and grains and could not therefore digest meat originated from overseas. Although it was presented and perceived as a joke, it had nonetheless a telling emotional impact.[10]

A more serious and recent example is the conclusion reached by the committee chair of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Committee, Kiyoshi Kurokawa, when he wrote:

> [The Fukushima nuclear disaster's] fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to 'sticking with the program'; our groupism; and our insularity.
> Had other Japanese been in the shoes of those who bear responsibility for this accident, the result may well have been the same.[11]

This declaration is yet another classic example of Japanese cultural essentialism, and the fact that it only appears in the English version is equally symptomatic. In this case, the effect of essentialism was to blame the nuclear accident on culture, which was in actual fact scathingly criticized in the foreign media.

Those examples simply confirm that becoming conscious of the Western gaze is what sets Japanese cultural essentialism in motion, producing a dual-layered discourse – outward-looking and inward-looking. Hence, the conviction that the "Japanese exception" as promoted by the ideology of Cool Japan and various other right wing discourses is legitimate no matter how flawed it is.[12] In fact, the issue remains the same

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pseudonym that he invented.

[10] Tracing this "myth" back to its original source is difficult, but it is widely spread in Japan and was used to convince Japanese people of their "uniqueness." One possible origin could be that it was a story invented by the Japanese Government during the Pacific War to avoid general discontent with meat shortages. However, no written evidence has yet been found to support this explanation.

[11] See Kiyoshi Kurokawa (黒川清)'s "Message from the Chairman," added to the English version of the final report submitted to the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Committee (*Tokyo Denryoku Fukushima Genshiryoku Hatsudensho Jikochosa Iinkai Houkokusho* 東京電力福島原子力発電所事故調査委員会報告書), published by The National Diet of Japan, 2012. Chairman Kurokawa's Message, which calls Fukushima "a disaster 'Made in Japan'," can be seen as a typical example of Japanese cultural essentialism. Strikingly, the Japanese version does not include the aforementioned quote. The full English version of the report is available at http://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/3856371/naiic.go.jp/en/report/.

[12] One recent example is Shinya Sawaki's *Nihonjin shika motanai nouryoku* (沢木真也『日本人しか持たない能力』, Abilities only Japanese have), published in 2012. The author explains why Japanese people do not lose their sense of order and politeness in spite of devastating disasters such as the 2011 Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami. Sawaki argues that the alleged unique function of the Japanese brain stems from being conditioned by the exceptional

when critical and liberal intellectuals claim that Japan is particularly hopeless and backward: it is acceptable as long as the country is still perceived to be "exceptional."[13]
 Those are precisely the reasons why even expressions that smack of "negative" Japanese essentialism – such as *Why can't real democracy take off in Japan too?* or, *Why can't Japanese people still not manage to speak English?* – never cease to be popular.

IV

Concluding Remarks

To argue assertively against the idea of Japanese uniqueness would simply lead to being drawn into the same circuitous loop as its proponents. To put it differently, as soon as we start questioning the reasons why it is only in Japan that such a strong belief in the particularity of one's nation or culture can be found, we simply contribute to Japanese cultural essentialism, albeit in a different way. Similar to when nuclear reactors reach a critical point, perhaps what is needed is to to shut down the ideological chain reaction and to cool down the heat around Cool Japan. In order for this to happen, Japanese people must stop their old habit of keeping one "face" for the domestic audience, and wearing another one for the overseas, international audience. The outer and inner sides of Japanese culture need to be brought closer together, so that the cooling down of nationalism can begin. Japan should be seen as a country like any other, and on those terms we should love it as our own.

BIOGRAPHY

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structure of the Japanese language. Appeals to "language" or "brain" have been very popular ways to persuade Japanese people of their uniqueness. See also Tadanobu Kadota's 1978 bestseller *Nihonjin no Nou* (角田忠信『日本人の脳』, The Japanese brain).

[13] It may seem strange that Japanese people enjoy reading books and watching TV programs that show how odd and peculiar they and their culture look to other people in the world. The 1998-2002 TV show *Kokoga Hendayo Nihonjin* (ここがヘンだよ、日本人, This doesn't make sense, Japanese people!) was a case in point in that it displayed non-Japanese guests telling openly how weird Japanese behaviors are. The popularity of such a program is no indication of either humbleness or masochism on behalf of the Japanese audience; rather, it betrays a psychology that seeks self-assurance in the feeling of being exceptional.

AMERICAN IDENTITY AND AMERICAN GUN CULTURE: A BUDDHIST DECONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

While various groups argue about the cause of America's ongoing gun crisis, any feasible solution must address the historical roots of *taṇhā* (thirst) that fuel America's gun culture. Killers often identify themselves as outsiders, and many have been marginalized and bullied. Gun supporters perceive themselves as free and independent spirits, latter day Minuteman stalwartly defending the Constitution. Gun sellers, seemingly devoid of compassion, assume that like any savvy businessperson they are simply supplying what people demand. Buddhist epistemology exposes the delusory *ātman* at the core of our misidentifications as individuals and groups. When interconnectedness (*pratītya-samutpāda*) goes unrealized, ignorance disconnects us from the reality of *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* Suchness (*tathāta*), with devastating consequences. Buddhist texts such as the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* analyze the process by which deluded identities evolve along with consciousness, allowing us to deconstruct and realistically realign them.

I

The *Dukkha* of Gun Culture: Tribalism Triumphant?

Stephen Toulmin declares, "It is time for philosophers to come out of their self-imposed isolation and re-enter the collective world of practical life and shared human problems."[1] I will argue that the Buddhist philosopher is well equipped to respond to this call through an epistemological deconstruction that liberates us from individual and cultural confines. The ability and willingness to doubt our most endearing cultural assumptions are required to counteract dogmatic fixations that have been proven to induce *dukkha*.

To answer Toulmin's call for relevancy, we need to delve into, even dive into contemporary controversies, offering a fresh perspective on today's forms of *dukkha* by identifying their initiating delusions. I propose here as a case study of one of the most divisive controversies in America currently – social and governmental responses to the growing toll of gun violence. The recurring incidents of mass murder on university campuses (Viginia Tech, 2007), in high schools (Columbine, 1999), and even religious buildings (Wisconsin, 2012), military bases (Fort Hood, 2009), and movie theaters (Aurora, 2012) have riveted public attention.[2] Concerns spiked further in 2011 when Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot in the head while meeting with her constituents; 6 died and 14 were injured. However, opposition to the uncontrolled flow of weaponry has been uniquely galvanized by the 2012 slaughter of twenty first graders and six staff members at the ill-fated Sandy Hook Elementary School. The United States is one of only three countries that recognize a constitutional right to bear arms, and uniquely poses no restrictions on said right.

The American killing fields call to mind the Burning House described in the third chapter of *The Lotus Sutra*.[3] This *upāyic* Buddhist horror story exudes adrenalin pumping violence, reminiscent of the slasher films beloved by adolescents. Various animal predators threaten a rich man's children trapped in a decrepit mansion. The foxes, wolves and jackals may now be replaced by vampires, zombies, werewolves, gangbangers – even other children and adolescents. As raging fires of desire consume the building around them, the children persist, insist, on pursuing their mindless amusements, playing games with ominous names such as Killzone, Battlefield, Assassins, and Mortal Kombat – "unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear."[4] They are, indeed, amusing themselves to death![5]

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[1] Stephen Toulmin quoted by Kenneth R. Weiss, "From Dorm Room to Academic Center stage," *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1997; B6, accessed November 18, 2013, http://articles.latimes.com/print/1997-02-12/local/me-28039_1_dorm-life.

[2] The respective death tolls are as follows: Virginia Tech, 32 dead, 17 wounded, gunman in custody; Columbine, 13 dead, 24 injured, two gunmen suicides; the Wisconsin Sikh temple, 6 dead, 3 wounded, shooter suicide; Fort Hood, 13 dead, 30 injured, wounded shooter in custody; Aurora theater, 12 dead, 58 wounded, shooter in custody.

[3] *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[4] Ibid., 59.

[5] See Neil Postman and Andrew Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

President Barack Obama has led the movement to, at last, confront the deadly *dukkha* wrought by guns in America, making gun regulation legislation a highlight of his 2013 State of the Union Address; he noted that over thousand Americans had died from gun violence in just the two months after the Sandy Hook slaughter.[6] Billionaire and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who already funds Mayors Against Illegal Guns, started a new organization, Independence USA, to empower politicians sympathetic to his cause. Congresswoman Giffords and her husband have their own organization, Americans for Responsible Solutions. Questions are now being posed by politicians, the media, and average citizens. Who are the people responsible for these deaths and why do they feel compelled to own and wield guns? What kinds of guns are involved, how many guns are there, what is the capacity of the magazines, and who has the guns? Proposed solutions include stricter control over access to guns, sweeping background checks, curbing violent entertainment venues (videos games, films), and expanding mental health care.

Those supporting gun regulation have been confronted by a very vocal minority touting gun rights. The more irrational the counterargument, the greater the intensity with which it is presented. Members of the National Rifle Association (NRA) have longed vowed to never surrender their weapons until their fellow citizens literally and figuratively "pry it from my cold, dead hands."[7] The phrase gained popularity following the 129th NRA convention, in Charlotte, North Carolina in May 20, 2000. NRA lobbyist James J. Baker warned the conventioneers:

> For the next six months, [Democratic presidential candidate and then-Vice President of the United States, Al Gore] is going to smear you as the enemy. He will slander you as gun-toting, knuckle-dragging, bloodthirsty maniacs who stand in the way of a safer America. Will you remain silent?[8]

Picking up a replica of a Colonial musket, the actor Charlton Heston, then president of the NRA, declared:

> As we set out this year to defeat the divisive forces that would take freedom away, I want to say those fighting words for everyone within the sound of my voice to hear and to heed, and especially for you, Mr. Gore: 'From my cold, dead hands!'[9]

Eight years later, then presidential candidate Barack Obama was criticized for characterizing such disaffected Americans: "They get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."[10] These anecdotes succinctly exemplify the battlelines in the 2013 debate over gun regulation.

Simplistic platitudes have been offered to block change, such as "guns don't kill

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[6] February 12, 2013; accessed November 18, 2013, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address.

[7] YouTube Video "Charlton Heston; From My Cold Dead Hands. Long Version"; accessed December 12, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ju4Gla2odw.

[8] James Dao, "NRA leaders cast Gore as archenemy," *New York Times*, May 20, 2000; accessed December 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/21/us/nra-leaders-cast-gore-as-archenemy.html.

[9] Dao.

[10] San Francisco fundraiser, April 2008; accessed November 18, 2013, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-502443_162-4011169-502443.html.

people, people kill people" and "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."[11] That claim was shown patently false in August 2013 when Antoinette Tuff, a school bookkeeper in Decatur, Georgia talked a young gunman with an AK-47 into peacefully surrendering to police. Disregarding such evidence, gun enthusiasts envision themselves as defenders of freedom and the Second Amendment of the Constitution ("A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed"). For example, a 2013 pro-gun demonstration was held in conjunction with the Freedompalooza festival, whose banner included an American flag, the U.S. Constitution, and the slogan "Our First Shot at Liberty."[12] They warn of dire consequences should guns be subject to regulation:

> As long as the American people are able to arm themselves properly there will never be a 'cultural revolution' that takes 60 million lives like that in China. A disarmed man is no man, he is a slave to his oppressors.[13]

Some have argued that we need more guns, especially in schools, not fewer. Following their logic, world peace cannot be promoted through nuclear nonproliferation, but only by endless proliferation.

Much less attention has been paid to the mental state of the shooters. Adam Lanford, a specialist in Criminal Law, has identified three factors that distinguish suicidal rampage shooters – 1) longstanding suicidal thoughts linked to mental illness; 2) "a deep sense of victimization" from being bullied or presumed oppression or persecution; and 3) a thirst for fame, even if that entails martyrdom.[14] Seeking righteous revenge against class bullies, Columbine killers Harris and Klebold saw their actions as perfectly justified by the cruel treatment they had suffered at school. Virginia Tech shooter Seung-Hui Cho left a note referring to Harris and Klebold as martyrs. One of Cho's videos revealed the depths of his *dukkha* in accusations aimed at his fellow students:

> You have vandalized my heart, raped my soul, and torched my conscience. You thought it was one pathetic boy's life you were extinguishing. Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to

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[11] NRA unofficial slogan; Wayne LaPierre, NRA's executive vice-president; "Only 'A Good Guy With A Gun' Can Stop School Shootings, NRA Says," by Mark Memmott. December 21, 2012; accessed November 18, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/12/21/167785169/live-blog-nra-news-conference.

[12] Jesse McKinley, "Upset Over Gun Limits, Group Plans Upstate Concert as Part of '14 Election Push," *New York Times*, July 11, 2013, A21. The Freedompalooza website identifies itself as "an annual festival committed to the fight for freedom by exposing the truth by means of music, speakers and vendors dedicated to helping Americans be successful in restoring our Republic. The place where Patriots come to make friends for life." accessed November 18, 2013, http://freedompalooze.blogspot.com/.

[13] Online comment countering a call for gun regulation, quoted by Felicity Barringer, "Where Guns Are a Way of Life, and a Living," *New York Times*, February 20, 2013; accessed November 18, 2013?, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/21/us/in-montanas-kalispell-guns-are-a-matter-of-lifehtml ?ref=us.

[14] Adam Lankford, "What Drives Suicidal Mass Killers," *New York Times*, December 18, 2012, A.29. Lankford notes the similarities between terrorist suicide bombers and rampage shooters; if born in the Middle East, he speculates, American shooters could have become Jihaddists. Adam Lankford, "What Drives Suicidal Mass Killers," *New York Times*, December 18, 2012, A.29.

inspire generations of the weak and defenseless people.[15]

Aurora shooter Holmes, who had a Batman fetish, erupted during a viewing of a Batman film, sporting similar bright orange hair to that of Batman's nemesis, the Joker. Norwegian shooter Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 and wounded 242, fancied himself as a "grand master" of the Knights Templar, perpetuating the anti-Muslim violence of the Christian Crusaders. Themes of righteous revenge and vigilante violence abound in computer games and films, many of which have been linked to such shooters.[16]

Those who fail to see the danger of guns seem to suffer from their own sense of deluded identity, very likely spawned by what Popper has described as "reactionary movements which have tried, and still try, to overthrow civilization and return to tribalism."[17] The poison of fear spawns anger and defensiveness. Most importantly, their delusions are communal, leading them to organize and commiserate. Like so many of the mass shooters, they seek vindication in their roles as champions of truth, justice, and the American way. This American way of violence is echoed in the voices heard by schizophrenics. A comparison between patients in the U.S. with those in India revealed a much greater level of violence in the former group. T. M. Luhrmann suggests that:

> The root of the differences may be related to the greater sense of assault that [people] who hear voices feel in a social world where minds are so private and (for the most part) spirits do not speak. We Americans live in a society which, when people feel threatened, they think about guns.[18]

The attachment of shooters to their weapons betrays a deep-seated thirst (*taṇhā*), which cannot be quenched. The simplistic assertion that a "disarmed man is no man, he is a slave to his oppressors,"[19] eerily echoes the famous declaration of American Founding Father Patrick Henry (1736-1799): "Give me liberty or give me death!"[20] From here it is but a short step to the assumption that "happiness is a warm gun," the headline on the May 1968 cover of the NRA's magazine, *The American Rifleman* (1923-). It led to John Lennon's parody of American culture in the song of the same name:

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[15] "Shooter: 'You have blood on your hands,' April 18, 2007; accessed December 12, 2013, http://edition.cnn.com/2007/US/04/18/vtech.nbc/.

[16] There is evidence that some of the shooters used violent video games as training videos. Cinematic revenge fantasies range from the five films in the "Death Wish" series that first appeared in 1974, to the ongoing visual assaults of American director Quentin Tarantino. Tarantino's work has featured Jewish retaliation against Nazis during World War II ("Inglorious Bastards"); a martial arts assassin who takes on assorted colleagues turned villains ("Kill Bill"); and most recently a black slave who avenges himself against white oppressors in the pre-Civil War American South ("Django Unchained").

[17] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. I, The Spell of Plato* (London: Routledge, 1947), 1.

[18] T. M. Luhrmann, "The Violence in Our Heads," *New York Times*, September 20, 2013, A27.

[19] Barringer.

[20] Patrick Henry, speech to the Virginia Convention, St. John's Church, Richmond, Virginia, March 23, 1775.

When I hold you in my arms (oh yes)
When I feel my finger on your trigger (oh yes)
I know nobody can do me no harm
Because
happiness is a warm gun, momma
Happiness is a warm gun
-Yes it is.[21]

This sentiment is shared by those who promote shooting as a form of therapy. In two recent cases, those who arranged gun-based therapeutic sessions for disturbed individuals were shot dead – the Survivalist mother of the Sandy Hook shooter as well as a former military sniper reaching out to a fellow vet.[22] Even proponents of increased regulation find it necessary to passionately defend gun ownership publicly as part of the American gun culture. Accordingly Vice-President Joe Biden, who has taken the lead in the White House's campaign for new legislation, urged people to "Buy a shotgun" on a Facebook video chat instead of an assault weapon (February 19, 2013).

II

Deeper *Taṇhā*, Embedded in the Three Poisons

Different cultures thirst for different things, based on their unique cultural experiences and heritage. Norwegians apparently thirst for wood and fires, as reflected in the widely popular TV program *National Firewood Night*. Host Rebecca Nedregotten Strand stated that the aim was to "try to get to the core of Norwegian firewood culture – because firewood is the foundation of our lives."[23] Author Derek Miller (*Norwegian by Night*, 2013) explains the fascination as follows, "The sense of creating warmth, both symbolically and literally, to share conversation, to share food, to share silence, is essential to the Norwegian identity,"[24] The Norwegian attachment to firewood has not made them into a nation of pyromaniacs. The American thirst for guns, however, has led to great suffering at all levels of society. Among "high income" countries, such as Japan and Germany, the U.S. has the highest gun homicide rate, the highest number of guns per capita (88.1/100), and the highest number of gun deaths from assault (3.21/100,000).[25] Far more conservative oriented Republicans than the generally "liberal" Democrats own guns (60% to 25% in 2008), and ownership is higher in rural versus urban areas. The most educated are the least likely to own guns.

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[21] Beatles, *White Album*, Apple, 1968 SWB0 101.

[22] Retired Navy Seal Chris Kyle was gunned down at a Texas shooting range in February 2013 by former Marine Eddie Ray Routh. Kyle, author of *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History*, is credited with more than 150 confirmed kills in Iraq.

[23] Sarah Lyall, "Bark Up or Down? Firewood Splits Norwegians," *New York Times*, February 19, 2013, A4. The show was inspired by the best-selling book, *Solid Wood: All About Chopping, Drying and Stacking Wood – and the Soul of Wood-Burning*, written by Lars Mytting.

[24] Ibid., A4.

[25] Statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, cited by Charles M. Blow, "On Guns, America Stands Out, *New York Times*, December 19, 2012; accessed November 18, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/20/opinion/blow-on-guns-america-stands-out.html.

For many, gun possession promises to bring with it an identity imbued with strength and responsibility, evoking the typically American free and independent spirit of the Minutemen who overthrew British oppression. After moving to Texas, a self-confessed "liberal gun owner" justified his surrender to America's gun culture based on the psychology of masculine identity:

> A prevailing theory holds that boys are simultaneously aware of their own physical powerlessness and society's mandate that they serve as protectors of the innocent. Pretending to shoot a bad guy assuages this anxiety, which never goes away completely … I am my family's last line of defense. I have chosen to meet this responsibility, in part, by being armed … not every choice we make is data-driven. A lot comes from the gut.[26]

Gun ownership has been increasing among American women since 1980 by appealing to their thirst for an independent and empowered identity. Gun marketers even have exploited an appeal to the maternal instinct, pairing images of a mother and child with the motto "Self-protection is more than your right … it's your responsibility."[27]

Nor can we discount the post-9/11 virtual militarization of American culture. Although only a small portion of the American population has been directly involved in more than a decade of armed conflict, the priority of "homeland security" has infused the daily lives of average Americans. Government revenues dedicated to the wars have taken the economy to the very brink of collapse. Funds sorely needed for essential infrastructure in the area of education and other social programs have been reallocated to defense – or prisons. The war on terror has so permeated the Americans psyche that terrorist threats are common plot lines in films, television shows, and video games.

The search for a single cause responsible for this *dukkha*-drenched situation is futile. The availability of guns, violent entertainment, and undertreated mental illness are all risk factors. The desire/thirst for and celebration of guns as well as the resultant violent behavior can be traced back to a common cause, a communal delusion that has shaped the ways mentally ill shooters, overwhelmingly young males and generally white, act out their private delusions. The fuel for this thirst for guns can be found in what Thomas Hobbes designates as the three "principal causes of quarrel" – competition, diffidence, and glory.[28] Given these assumptions about the fragility of human nature, legitimacy was claimed for the Leviathan; an authoritarian government that would end the contentious state of nature – a war "of every man against every man."[29]

More recently the work of Hobbes has been reevaluated in light of scientific studies of human nature.[30] He is insightful, but not completely accurate. Hobbes' list mirrors Buddhism's assessment of human weakness, with one glaring difference – in Buddhism

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[26] Justin Cronin, "Confessions of a Liberal Gun Owner," *New York Times*, January 28, 2013, A17.

[27] Erica Goode, "Rising Voice of Gun Ownership is Female: For Many, Mastering a Weapon Is a Statement of Identity," *New York Times*, February 11, 2013, A9.

[28] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII, ed. Nelle Fuller, Great Books of the Western World, Vol. 23 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1971).

[29] Ibid., 85.

[30] Psychologist Steven Pinker observes "Hobbes himself didn't think through the problem deeply enough," *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011), 160. For Toulmin, Hobbesian theory is "paradigmatic" of the abstract, decontextualized theories spun during the rise of modernity under the auspices of seventeenth century rationalism; 77.

competition, diffidence, and glory are not regarded as humankind's "natural condition." Instead they are assumed to be externally imposed dysfunctions, referred to as the Three Poisons: greed/lust (*rāga*貪), anger/hatred (*dveṣa* 瞋), and ignorance/delusion (*moha*痴). While there may be an innate tendency to act on these three motivators, the inevitability of the outcomes is open to dispute.

An interesting parallel exists here to human cravings for sugar, salt, and fat. Scientific research has established that these three are very alluring to us. All of our taste buds are hardwired to crave a sugar high, since glucose provides the energy essential for brain function. Fat is essential to energize the entire body, absorb nutrients, and regulate body temperature. Our taste for salt develops later, around six months after birth. Marshaling the power of mathematics and science, the food industry has learned to manipulate these natural cravings to benefit their bottom lines, generating consumer addiction to their products. Through a sophisticated process of trial and error, various foods have been "optimized" to determine the "bliss point" that will maximize cravings.[31] Consider a similar process; for a thousand years the people of the Andes used coca leaves for medicinal and restorative purposes. But today the highly concentrated ingredients of those leaves are marketed as cocaine, leaving myriads of addicts in its wake.

The threefold analysis shared by Hobbes and Buddhism illuminates the ways people become addicted to guns:

COMPETITION Driven by a desire for gain (greed/lust), humans compete with each other using violent means. The aptly named vulture capitalists who manufacture guns are happy to feed on death, netting $5 billion worth of sales in 2012. They aggressively market their weapons of destruction and employ the NRA to vehemently oppose any regulations, employing cultural code words such as freedom and responsibility. One Ad promotes a particular model "as American as apple pie."[32] Military imagery associated with commercial weapons like assault weapons pointedly evokes their combat precursors. Researcher Tom Diaz (*The Last Gun*) explains the link to masculine identity: "There are a lot of young men in the U.S. who will never be in the military but feel male compulsion to warriorhood … Owning an assault weapon is a passport to that."[33] Game critic and avid gamer Stephen Totilo has written an article entitled *In Defense of Offense: Why We Gamers Shoot.* His account can be read as a rationalization of competitive impulses fueled by violent scenarios, which he assumes are hermetically sealed from any negative after affects:

> Shooting in video games is ultimately the connecting of Point A to Point B, the elimination of one set of shapes, representing the enemy, from a TV screen to keep another arrangement of shapes, representing you, illuminated and ready for the next encounter … a laboratory for tactical decisions and a test chamber for your reflexes and wits. [34]

[31] Michael Moss, "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food," *New York Times Magazine*, February 24, 2013, 34-48. Howard Moskowitz, "a food-industry legend," proudly boasts "I've optimized soups. I've optimized pizzas. I've optimized salad dressings and pickles. In this field, I'm a game changer"; 38.

[32] Natasha Singer, "The Most Wanted Gun in America: How the AR-15 became an industry profit machine," *New York Times*, February 3, 2013, BU7.

[33] Ibid., BU7.

[34] Totilo, *New York Times*, November 13, 2012, C1.

Totilo compares it to the escapist pleasure of a good gym workout whereby the "rest of your life is momentarily forgotten."[35]

Gun manufacturers also promote profits through "youth-marketing initiatives" for those 12 and under, to groom "peer ambassadors." They sponsor 'recreational' shooting events for children, even supporting a *Junior Shooters* magazine. The rationale is that shooting instills a sense of personal responsibility, protecting America's gun-infused "heritage," which some considered "endangered." Even when laws prohibit the use of assault weapons by children, they can indulge in the virtual reality of video games to try out the military hardware popular among adults. There's even an app for that – Point of Impact.[36] These same games are a lucrative tool for product placement, featuring links to manufacturer's websites. One enthusiast called the Medal of Honor site "a virtual showroom for guns." [37] The games are so realistic that the U.S. military uses video games such as Call of Duty to recruit and trains its soldiers. The Norwegian mass murderer Breivik also claimed to have trained for his killing spree using Call of Duty.

The entertainment industry is equally motivated by greed, churning out films and television series in which gun use is as ubiquitous as it is heroic. From James Bond to Rambo and "Die Hard" protagonist John McClane, a good guy with a gun, is made to seem like the only way to thwart a bad guy with a gun, just as the NRA president has avowed. Police dramas continue to be widely popular in the U.S., with many now melded with military scenarios in top-rated shows focusing on the NCIS (Naval Criminal Investigative Service), spanning the east and west coasts with their Washington DC and Los Angeles locations. To compete for market share it is necessary to increase the body count and provide ever more graphic scenes of carnage.

DIFFIDENCE Spurred by a perceived threat to personal security (anger/hatred), Hobbes sees violence as the natural response demanded for self-defense. Paradoxically, fear of death propels many to seek out risk by pursuing violent sports (football, hockey), extreme sports (snowmobile acrobatics in the X Games), and fight club scenarios. The reward is the adrenalin rush that comes from cheating death – until death finally wins. Even cooking shows have become competitive, a life and death battle in which the loser is summarily "chopped." As we have seen, gun owners believe that only the exercise of their Second Amendment rights can prevent government oppression, making them true freedom-loving Americans.

The level of paranoia is exacerbated for white males, whose previous economic and political domination of American society is being eroded as the voices of women and

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[35] Ibid., C7.

[36] Mike McIntire, "Selling a New Generation on Guns: Industry Recruits Children, Using Contests, Games and Semiautomatics," *New York Times*, January 27, 2013, A1,A14.

[37] Barry Meier and Andrew Martin, "Real and Virtual Firearms Nurture a Marketing Link: Violent Video Games Become a Proving Ground for Product Placement," *New York Times*, December 25, 2012, A1, A3. Similarly, in the food industry Moss studied "a conscious effort – taking place in labs and marketing meetings and grocery-store aisles – to get people hooked on foods that are convenient and inexpensive"; he exposes "how the foods are created and sold to people who, while not powerless, are extremely vulnerable to the intensity of these companies' industrial formulations and selling campaigns"; 37. Parallels have been drawn to the cigarette industry, which manipulated scientific data for its own purposes while avidly working to avoid government regulation. In Taiwan Long Life cigarettes were once sold by the government itself.

minority groups are increasingly heeded. President Obama has become the all too obvious symbol of this inexorable power shift, especially after his resounding re-election, which shocked a deludedly over-confident Republican Party. The paranoia is palpable in recent high profile cases. The controversial Stand Your Ground law in Florida came to national attention in the case against George Zimmerman, who pursued and shot an unarmed black teenager yet was acquitted. In South Africa Olympian, and "gun enthusiast," Oscar Pistorius has defended shooting his girlfriend to death as a reasonable response to what he thought was a home invasion.[38] Radio host Eusebius McKaiser views the case from a broader perspective:

> South Africa's apartheid past normalized violence as a means of dealing with personal and nationwide problems and it has created a paranoid nation obsessed with the threat of crime.[39]

The same defensive diffidence prevails in the camp presumably issuing the threat. Ta-Nehisi Coates reveals the Hip Hop reality in an analysis of the work of black rapper Kendrick Lamar: "Fantasies of rage and lust are present, but fear pervades Lamar's world."[40] Coates draws on his own experience growing up in Baltimore: "Death corrupted the most ordinary of rituals. On an average day in middle school fully a third of my brain was obsessed with personal safety."[41] He sees it as a world "created not by mindless nature but by public policy." For Adam Sternbergh, the working class hero of the "Die Hard" series is representative of pervasive "fear, anxiety, frustration, uncertainty and, despite it all, irrational hope."[42] What seems to make that vestige of hope so irrational is the fact that it comes from the barrel of a gun.

GLORY Hobbes asserts that our need for glory, to uphold our reputation, leads to violence due to "trifles" – "A word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name."[43] In other words, the thirst to protect one's sense of self-identity or group identity. This seems to be a primary factor in the mass shootings noted above, as well as among those who continue to cling to their guns:

> **I** have been victimized, and so must obliterate my oppressors.
> **I** must take responsibility for my family and protect them with deadly force.
> **I** have failed and must commit suicide, and take my family with me.
> **I** must demonstrate my power, as a woman or a minority or former majority.

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[38] South African Journalist Hagen Engler observed: "The best case is that he shot her by mistake. And that is a particularly South African mistake, that we are so paranoid you are ready to fire off bullets when you don't know what is coming"; Lydia Polgreen, "A Nation Reels as a Star Runner Is Charged in Girlfriend's Death," *New York Times*, February 14, 2013, A6.
[39] Eusebius McKaiser, "Cry, The Misogynistic Country," *New York Times*, February 21, 2013, A21.
[40] Ta-Neishi Coates, "Hip-Hop Speaks To the Guns," *New York Times*, February 7, 2013, A23.
[41] Ibid., A23.
[42] Adam Sternbergh, "Desperate, Beleaguered, Cornered, Aggrieved, Battered, Frustrated, Fed Up," *New York Times Magazine*, February 24, 2012, 53.
[43] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 85.