

1-1-2013

Conceptualizing Identity As Performance In Young Adult Dystopian Literature

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Conceptualizing Identity as Performance

in Young Adult Dystopian Literature

(TITLE)

BY

Kelly F. Franklin

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

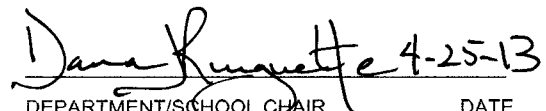
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Abstract

Young Adult Literature has historically been read as a genre that encourages singular identity formation. Scholars have argued that this literature inspires young adult readers to find their true identity by showcasing characters in the process of identity construction. However, when read through the lens of performance theory – a vast field that encompasses many disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, literature and theatre – it becomes evident that YAL actually encourages the formation of multiple roles and identities. This genre features characters trying on new roles, casting assigned roles aside, and assuming new identities to best suit their settings. As such, this project focused on identity formation as performance in YAL dystopian literature and the impact this has on the subgenre, real young adults, and its part in the current crossover trend.

YAL is currently aggressively performative, but it has always been thus. In order to examine this trait this project used texts that have been written over the past 30 years such as: *The Giver*, *The House of the Scorpion*, *Catching Fire*, *Mockingjay*, and *Little Brother*. It is apparent in all of these dystopian texts that multiple identity performance is an inherent trait of the genre – and always has been. Many YAL texts feature characters in the throes of identity formation who assume different roles in order to gain control of their strictly controlled environments. This notion is particularly important for adolescents to recognize because once these young people realize that identity is a performance, performance that allows adolescents to assume power in their lives, they can become comfortable in their own real settings. Young adults are then able to transition into the many roles that await them in the adult world more effectively. This

project draws upon theories written by performance theorists such as: Bertolt Brecht, Erving Goffman, Richard Schechner (and others) and also applies current scholarly readings to these YAL dystopian texts in order to argue that YAL does and has always encouraged the formation of multiple identities and roles.

Dedication

I dedicate this project to my four children, who inspire me to be the best that I can be.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the wonderful leadership and guidance of Dr. Melissa Ames. Dr. Ames pushed me harder than any other professor ever has, and because of that I have become a better scholar, writer, student, and person. I thank her, from the bottom of my heart, for her dedication, time, and great advice.

The time I spent working with Dr. Chris Wixson proved to be some of my most favorite moments as a scholar and student. Dr. Wixson was always encouraging and willing to except my sometimes out of the box ideas. The work that I did with Dr. Wixson enabled me to articulate my project, and I am very grateful for this tutelage and guidance (as well as his quick wit and sense of humor).

Dr. Lania Knight helped me to truly understand how Epic Theatre and the Theatre of the Oppressed work, and helped me to not only see how relevant they are to Young Adult Literature but also to real life. Dr. Knight was always available when I needed her, and often greeted me with a much needed (and warm) smile.

Dr. Fern Kory has been a mentor to me since I arrived at EIU. She has encouraged me from day one and made me feel like I could accomplish my goals. She is a wonderful woman (who also has fantastic taste in books).

Dr. Tim Taylor has taught me many lessons about composition and teaching. He has attempted to help me with my comma abuse, and once paid me the best compliment that I have ever received. I value all the lessons he taught me. I'll miss you the most Scarecrow!

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Introduction

Referred to solely by the initial 'A', the central character of David Levithan's 2012 young adult novel entitled *Every Day* wakes up every morning in a new body. The book begins provocatively:

I wake up. Immediately I have to figure out who I am. It's not just the body – opening my eyes and discovering whether the skin on my arm is light or dark, whether my hair is long or short, whether I'm fat or thin, boy or girl, scarred or smooth. The body is the easiest thing to adjust to...It's the life, the context of the body, that can be hard to grasp. Every day I am someone else. I am myself – I know I am myself – but I am also someone else. It has always been like this. (1)

The novel is being heralded by critics as groundbreaking work. However, young adult literature (YAL) has long possessed this kind of meta-theatrical sensibility, depicting characters well aware of the ways in which their roles have been scripted by authorities and how identity is plural not singular. Surprisingly, YAL has not been read in these terms, even when its current turn towards dystopia serves to accentuate the genre's inherent ability to endorse multiple role formation. This project uses the interpretive lens of performance theory in order to study the theatrical nature of role playing in YAL as an awareness of or an approach to representing identity construction and social interaction as if they are performance practices (role-playing, staging). Using critical vocabulary drawn from the field of performance theory, a broad field that integrates voices from cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and theater, this project seeks to interpret

dystopian YAL as a means of understanding not only its ideology but also its appeal for young and advanced readers alike.

In this project I have studied and researched current and classic YAL dystopian novels in order to argue that young adult literature encourages and embraces the formation of roles and development of selves. In order to highlight the notion of role performance, and point out that it is not new to current YAL, my project begins with a study of Lois Lowry's classic *The Giver* paired with a more recent dystopian novel by Nancy Farmer – *The House of the Scorpion*. By coupling these two novels together I am able to explain how this genre, long thought of as a genre steeped in the discovery of self and singular identity formation, instead encourages the development of multiple roles – and has for decades.

Currently, YAL is becoming more recognized as a genre read by children, young adults, and adults – a trend known as crossover. In fact, YAL has been described by Caroline Hunt, author of "Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists" as a genre that has been coming of age "for over a quarter century" (19). This notion can be attributed to the always changing nature of adolescents (who commonly read this genre) or to the fact that YAL ages with its readership. Perhaps this genre is read by many ages due its use of multiple role performance. YAL provides adult readers an opportunity to step away from the more fixed roles currently played in their lives and once again embrace, and remember, a time where multiple roles were a greater possibility. *The Hunger Games*, a popular cross-over text by Suzanne Collins, is well-liked by readers of all ages. Indeed, over the past decade dystopia has rapidly increased in popularity in literature (possibly due to Collins's successful series) especially YAL. There are many reasons currently

speculated for the rise in its popularity, spanning from the events of 9/11 to the economic crash of 2008. While this project does not primarily focus on the cause as to why dystopian young adult literature has become so popular, it will investigate potential explanations— one linked to role performance, especially that of performing technologies.

Dystopia is commonly recognized as a genre containing motifs and storylines of governmental control, technology, oppression, resistance, and often love. It has been argued that the YAL subdivision of dystopia is the only subset that ends with the heroes/heroines defeating the central force creating dystopic conditions (usually, but not always, the government), thus a happy ending (Sambell 164). Although this is a defining textual feature (the typical happy ending and/or glimmer of hope at the end of the narrative), this explanation really overshadows or ignores what is going on with this type of ending. While many argue that this happy ending is in place because it is developmentally appropriate, and all that the readers can handle, many of the characters in YAL dystopian fiction become the hero they are *because* of the government or force they are resisting. The rebellion that defines who many of these characters are, according to some scholarly readings, exists solely because of the controlling force – meaning that the identity formed to fight the dystopia is also a part of the dystopia, an already assigned role. The youth of today already deal with assigned roles and control (parental/governmental). Often a common answer to many young adults is resistance, and this rebellion frames the identities these youth craft and become. The Hunger Games series (known for themes such as: rebellion, angst, and control – comparable to situations in adolescent formative years in many ways) provides the perfect setting in order to study how youth perform resistance.

This project also explores how through the playing of multiple roles adolescents can heal after experiencing a tragedy or trauma. Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* provides the perfect setting, and possibly, historical context for this theory. In Doctorow's story Marcus Yallow's world has been permanently impacted by a terrorist attack in post-9/11 San Francisco. Marcus experiences the after effects of terror: strict monitoring of citizens (to ensure public safety), which are heightened beyond the norm due to the futuristic setting. The terrorist attack in the book kills thousands and brands many innocent citizens as suspects, 17-year old Marcus included. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) swiftly becomes an ever present and menacing Big Brother figure, plaguing Marcus and forcing him to extremes in order to protect himself, his family, and his country. In *Little Brother* Marcus, attempts to heal himself, and formulate how to live after his whole world has been destroyed. Although Doctorow creates a fictional climate dominated by "The Patriot Act II," this text alludes to how the real legislation in place by the US homeland security is impacting the performance of identities. This study argues that many youth living in the United States today have had to form identities impacted by terrorism, paranoia, and restricted freedom, just as Marcus does within Doctorow's novel.

Performance Theory – An Overview

Performance theory is a vast, multi-disciplined, and ever expanding field that allows one to take note of the inherent theatricality that exists in human nature. Theatricality is a term used to highlight the nature of character performance that can often be greatly based upon setting. Performance theorists believe that people perform different roles for many reasons: to experiment with identity, feel comfortable in new situations, and adjust to other personalities. According to Elizabeth Burns, "People

inhabit many social worlds, each of this is a construct, arising from a common perspective held by the members of that world. The behavior that takes place in any of these worlds can appear theatrical to observers who are not participants or to those newcomers who are just learning the rules" (13). Burns argues that due to these constructs people are always performing, and also continually being assessed – much like how an actor on stage is being assessed by its audience (12). Many people unfamiliar with theater do not recognize the performances that are present in day to day living. Burns suggests "People see what they expect to see, and the performers play up to these expectations as far as they are able" (14), which is true of everyday life as well as the theater and many youth (indeed people of all ages) often find themselves attempting to successfully perform a role that has been assigned by parents or society, while feeling as if they were born to play another role.

Literature can be thought of as the theater of the mind, and a form of escapism. Alongside this notion, Elizabeth Burns argues that "Theatre serves as a constant renewal of the claim to escape from the ritualized *personnage* into other moods, different representations of oneself, into new roles and different milieux, and gives access to entirely different conventional modes prevailing in other societies, other sectors of our own society, or other periods of historical time" (138). The theatrical nature of literature is easy to pinpoint, and can be found in any genre – YAL is no different. In fact, YAL embraces the performative and encourages multiple personage and role formation. Reading YAL through the lens of performance theory, allows for a rich study of the process of adolescent identity formation, as well as the opportunity to recognize the notion of performance theory in YAL. As an actor rehearses a part to play on stage, often

youth rehearse different identities (or roles) vicariously, which literature most graciously allows the opportunity for. Richard Schechner, a performance theorist, suggests that "Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories" (22). YAL dystopia does indeed evoke all of these characteristics in order to allow its characters not only to come of age, but to also allow for successful navigation of exceptionally difficult situations.

Erving Goffman, a writer and sociologist, used the term performance to "refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman 24). Goffman coined the term "front" to describe "the part of an individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance...Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (24). A "front" can then be thought of as a go-to identity, one that a person is most comfortable employing in a certain situation. However, it should be noted that a "front" can change depending on the observing audience and setting. YAL allows youth to monitor characters transitioning from "fronts" to other performed roles, thus providing positive opportunities for youth to observe and vicariously experience different roles.

By reading *The Giver*, *The House of the Scorpion*, *The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, *Mockingjay*, and *Little Brother* (all popular YAL texts) with performance theory in mind, it becomes evident that YAL is quite theatrical in nature, and endorses the theory of multiple role performance – a notion that has yet to be studied. Certainly, YAL has

always been a genre steeped in self discovery, but it appears it has also always been a genre that supports the idea multiple role performance. As such, dystopian YAL allows young adult readers the chance to embrace multiple role formation in their own lives – leading to a personality that is able to navigate not only the difficult setting of adolescence but adulthood as well.

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Chapter 1

Assigned Identity and Role Performance in *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion*

Introduction

YAL dystopias feature characters who are keenly aware of the roles and identities assigned to them by the controlling dystopic force. In many of these texts young adult characters are given roles that do not *feel* right, triggering emotional responses that often drive characters toward the development of new roles that better suit them. These actions, frequently deemed rebellious in dystopian literature, are in fact performances that allow characters to assume control in their lives – allowing for them to become more comfortable in their rigid settings. In many YAL dystopias, fictional people are not afforded power in their own lives. Roles are assigned by the controlling force (usually, but not always, a government) without regard to the emotions or rights of those being oppressed. Thus, characters under stress develop new roles in order to navigate the dystopian setting in such a way that allows for personal and emotional freedom. As such, reading YAL through the lens of performance theory brings to the forefront characters exhibiting personal agency and control over their own roles, in a setting where that is not generally allowed.

Typically, real adolescents are allowed few moments of control in their own lives and are frequently assigned roles by parents and institutions – arguably, controlling forces. Thus, many young adults are able to relate to the characters in YAL dystopias. Recognizing and engaging in role performance is important for many real young adults because performance can be considered a form of psychological stress management. According to adolescent psychologist David Elkind role performance leads to the

development of a personality that can better handle stressful experiences. Elkind states that role performance allows for:

An integrated sense of identity... that brings together into a working whole a set of attitudes, values, and habits that can serve both self and society. This leads to a healthy sense of identities and a feeling of self-esteem giving young people a perspective, a way of looking at themselves and others, which enables them to manage the majority of stress situations.
(196)

As such, YAL provides adolescent readers with characters in the process of performing roles and identities. Reading about characters engaged in multiple role and identity performance can serve to inspire real adolescents to incorporate role performance into their own lives, which, arguably, assists young adults in emotionally stressful situations.

Performance theory is generally used to study and interpret real human behavior; however, it is useful and thought provoking when applied to YAL. Indeed, the characters within *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* are fictional. However, both main characters struggle with identity formation as many real adolescents do, which can make these characters relatable for youth and valuable for those who study identity formation in adolescence. Though written more than a decade apart and differing greatly in storyline, both of these texts endorse the idea of multiple role formation versus the idea of singular identity. Pairing these two texts together in critical scholarship provides a rich yet broad look at YAL as a whole, in that these texts together represent this subgenre's inherent endorsement of multiple role formation. Both *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* encourage their main characters to seek out the role(s) that best suit them,

discarding their role assignments (determined by elders and biology). This notion is particularly relevant for young adults to read and witness, as arguably some young adults believe as if they are assigned roles based upon parental rules and societal expectations. Both Farmer and Lowry provide adolescents with vulnerable characters who are not afraid to feel and express their emotions and admit that their current settings do not suit them – allowing for personal growth and change.

Current Scholarly Interpretations

The Giver has been the focus of much scholarship since its 1993 publication. Carrie Hintz proposes that Lowry's classic novel "...sensitized readers to the important subgenre of utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults" (254). Indeed the controlled, colorless, bleak lifestyle of the people living in Lowry's fictional community evokes a natural reaction of shock and worry – arguably responses writers of dystopian literature wish to create. *The Giver* has garnered considerable interest from scholars studying in areas as diverse as critical race theory¹ and post-colonialism², and has recently caught the eye of trauma theorists. In the article "'A' is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the Children's Literature of Atrocity," author Kenneth Kidd suggests that the novel is a "...cautionary tale about contemporary US culture, and about the need for a thoughtful literature of atrocity. *The Giver* offers an allegorical, abstract solution to the problem of narrating trauma and, by being less

¹ Critical race theory recognizes that racism is inherent in American society and culture. Critical Race Theory identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color.

² Post-colonial criticism assumes a unique perspective on literature and politics, specifically; post-colonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonized. Post-colonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonizers controlling the colonized).

'historical' than other trauma texts, is less easily made into a keepsake" (144). As such, it is possible to circumnavigate some upsetting moments in the novel and dwell instead not on the atrocity of release³ but the larger issues in the text involving Jonas's rebellion and resistance. Don Latham, author of "Discipline and Its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of *The Giver*," suggests that "The novel thus serves to reintegrate readers into the power structures of our own society while at the same time empowering them as potential agents of positive social change" (135). To be sure, *The Giver* does feature a young adult character as an agent of social change operating in such a way as to emphasize the corrupt community he lives in – arguably a powerful notion for young adult readers to vicariously experience.

The scholarly work many trauma theorists have provided, in regards to *The Giver* and other YAL, is often linked to the emotional response of characters. Emotional response often creates agency within a character; certainly, many characters in YAL experience traumatic moments that act as catalysts to their future actions – in the case of Matt and Jonas, the refusal to fulfill an assigned role. However, many scholars do not read these emotional responses to traumatic situations as performative. Thus, there has not been research in regard to how these emotional acts affect readers vicariously experiencing these character performances. Lowry's *The Giver* features many characters that appear to be incapable of emotion. However, this is not the case in Nancy Farmer's novel which is ripe with characters who not only experience emotion, but use it as a means of control. Matt, the lead character in Farmer's text, is a clone and is considered,

³ In Jonas's community, members are released from their society when they are no longer useful. Although Jonas at first believes this means they are allowed a happy retirement somewhere, these people are actually euthanized.

by many characters in the novel, to be soulless and without feeling. The performance of this character, which is most often triggered by emotional responses, is seen as genuine by readers but as performance by characters in the book who consider him inhuman. Dystopian literature generally features high technology and occasionally characters who have been genetically altered by biotechnological engineering. Farmer's futuristic dystopia seems more focused on the emotional performance this type of setting allows for, rather than the high tech elements of the story.

Emotionally triggered performances are rampant in *The House of the Scorpion*, set in the fictional and futuristic land of Opium – which Farmer situates between The United States and Azatlan (formerly known as Mexico). The novel has often been read as a text that encourages personal rebellion and resistance. Abbie Ventura suggests that *The House of the Scorpion*, and other texts like it, “offer formulas for resistance through the youth subject, whether the character acts in isolation from her peers for herself or works for and with society as a collective whole”(90). Scholars are also interested in the cloning aspect of Farmer's novel and the relevance of this notion during what has often been referred to as the post-human age. Elaine Ostry argues that:

Much science fiction for young adults attempts to mediate the post-human age to a young audience. Through literature, young adults can become aware of, and participate in, the debates surrounding biotechnology. What are the pros and cons of such advances as cloning? Of what value is the human versus the new, 'improved' human? Literature confronts both the hopes and fears that biotechnology inspires. (223)

Indeed, Ostry and Ventura offer fascinating and relevant scholarship in regard to Farmer's novel. *The House of the Scorpion* does allow much room for scholarly exploration and interpretation of the post-human age. Bio-engineered characters in YAL are typically engaged in multiple role performance, as these characters often seek to prove their humanity. These characters can be seen playing their biologically assigned roles and also performing roles that better suit who they feel they truly are – generally a much different identity than the role assigned to them by society.

Despite the inherent nature of role performance in YAL dystopian texts, *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* have not been studied through a performance theory frame or theoretical lens. Both of these popular YAL texts contain young adult characters who not only have been assigned identities, but also characters who ultimately resist, discard, and form new identities that allow them to *feel* positive about who they are personally and socially. When read through the lens of performance theory, YAL novels act as emotionally transformational performances that allow for the successful integration of multiple roles and identities. As such, these novels provide readers with characters experiencing emotions in regard to their identity process, during a time when, arguably, many YAL readers' identity formation decisions are greatly based upon emotional responses.

Role Performance and Identity Process in *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion*

Erving Goffman, sociologist and author of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, outlined four interlocking components of performance and social roles: belief in the part, social fronts, dramatic realization, and idealization. All of these components are instrumental in how all people of all ages form identities. In the theater, in order for an

actor to successfully perform a role he must believe in it – and this is no different in everyday life. According to Bell, "Most of us believe in – and take seriously – the social roles we enact every day. We work both directly and indirectly to create impressions for ourselves and for others that we *are* who we claim to be (students, parents, employees, parishioners, Republicans, feminists, etc.)" (151, emphasis in original). Both Jonas and Matt struggle with believing in their assigned roles and are therefore unable to effectively perform the roles dictated by community and birth. Often when characters become uncomfortable in their roles they develop performance consciousness – meaning that characters become aware of their performance within a certain frame. Robert Schechner, offers the following examples of performance consciousness:

'me behaving as if I were someone else,' or 'as I am told to do,' or 'as I have learned.' Even if I feel myself wholly to be myself, acting independently, only a little investigating reveals that the units of behavior that compromise 'me' were not invented by 'me.' Or, quite the opposite, I may experience being 'beside myself,' 'not myself,' or 'taken over' as in a trance. The fact that there are multiple 'me's' in every person is not a sign of derangement but the way things are. (28)

Both Jonas and Matt exhibit performance consciousness in their stories, leading each of them to develop agency – crucial metacognitive aspects of both novels. As such, both characters take control of their own identities and destinies, rebelling against family and society. Della Pollock, performance theorist, suggests that "Performance becomes a site of transformation and even a paradigm for cultural resistance"(657). In the article "Performance," Deborah Kapchan argues that "To perform is to *carry something into*

effect – whether it be a story, an identity, an artistic artifact, a historical memory, or an ethnography. The notion of agency is implicit in performance" (479, emphasis in original). Indeed, the awareness of forced identity performance is different than purposeful identity performance. However, the forced performances of Jonas and Matt lead to each character making purposeful choices in regards to their identity formation.

The Giver, published in 1993, is the story of Jonas – a twelve-year old boy living in a futuristic community where choice is non-existent and identity is assigned. When Jonas learns the truth behind the perfect illusion his community has produced, he feels he can no longer perform the identity chosen for him. As such, Jonas makes a daring escape into Elsewhere. Although he faces unfamiliar terrain and circumstances, as well as new emotions, Jonas believes the dangers are worth the risk in order to discard his assigned identity and construct an identity based on his own thoughts and feelings.

In *The Giver*, audiences are afforded the opportunity to vicariously engage with a character in the process of performance consciousness as well as rebellion. At the age of twelve Jonas is assigned a career, by the elders in his community, that he will perform the rest of his life. Until the age of twelve Jonas's existence has been the same as every other boy and girl in his society. Jonas's community, governed by strict rules and regulations, encourages each person to grow and develop in a similar way in order to encourage "sameness."⁴ Every year in December, the children are awarded a milestone award depending on their age: names and families at the ceremony of one, bicycles upon turning nine, and careers at the ceremony of twelve. Jonas and his friends have grown up with

⁴ In *The Giver* sameness is used to make sure every person in the society is equal. Everything is black and white, skin is light, hair is dark, and eyes are generally dark – with the exception of The Giver, Jonas, and Gabe who all three have pale blue eyes. Genetic engineering and high technology has awarded the community the ability to design and control the environment and the people living in it.

identical rules, in the same colorless society, yet somehow Jonas is different than them. Jonas experiences something known as "seeing beyond," which first surfaces as his ability to see color. Due to this special talent, Jonas is assigned a highly esteemed role within his community, the position of Receiver. He is allowed, for the first time in his life, to live a completely different role than any other person in his community. Upon Jonas's new role assignment he is immediately designated as different within his community; the sameness that he has always lived with no longer applies to him. Jonas's new role in his community causes him to experience performance consciousness. The stark contrast of his new identity assignment is startling to him, he has never before been considered different – being without sameness causes Jonas to question his behavior and the reasons for it.

As the new Receiver Jonas receives memory transmissions from the Giver (the previous Receiver), and trains to someday replace the Giver in order to store all of the memories for the community.⁵ Gradually, as Jonas begins to understand the memories and begin to experience feelings, he becomes certain that he cannot perform the role of the Receiver: "Days went by, and weeks, Jonas learned, through the memories, the names of colors; and how he began to see them all, in his ordinary life (though he knew it was ordinary no longer, and would never be again" (Lowry 97). When Jonas learns about familial love, he quickly becomes dismayed with his family; he too wants to be a person who loves – yet no one in his community (aside from the Giver) is able to understand this concept. Jonas slowly realizes that he no longer believes in his previous or current role.

⁵ In order to achieve sameness the community no longer feels. The Receiver has been given all of their memories – thoughts of love, war, sadness, hurt, sunburns, murder, animals, snow, are all things of the past that one person, the Receiver, stores and mentally experiences every day, so that these memories can be used in times of council but also to ensure that people in the community no longer feel them.

Goffman suggests that "a performance is 'socialized,' molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (35). When Jonas is no longer able to believe in his role(s) he understands that he can no longer function in his society – this realization prompts him to leave the community, a daring escape which allows him to continue his process of identity transformation in a new setting.

Nancy Farmer's character Matt also struggles with disbelief in regards to the role he has been born into. *The House of the Scorpion*, published nine years after Lowry's text, also contains themes of assigned identity. Matteo Alacrán, Matt or Mi Vida, is the clone of a powerful and frightening man known throughout the fictional country of Opium as El Patrón. As a clone Matt has been assigned an identity – he is the exact physical replica of Matteo Alacrán senior (El Patrón). However, this identity does not suit the personality or characteristics of Matt. Through trials of discrimination, life threatening surgeries, and sabotage, Matt carefully constructs roles and identities that are vastly different from the biological one he has been assigned. Eventually, Matt makes an escape from Opium, but ultimately returns to be the rightful (and just) leader of Opium.

Matt has been cast in the role of non-person because he is a clone of El Patrón. Although Matt is no different in physical or mental biology than any other person living on the Alacrán ranch, he is regarded as a soul-less animal due to his clone status.

Goffman refers to this type of role as a discrepant role and defines the non-person as:

...persons who are treated, by team members and audience alike, as if they are not there. Servants, the elderly, small children, ill persons, and people in service roles (cab drivers, court reporters, photographers) are most often ignored in team performances – especially ceremonial ones. These roles

bring to light power dimensions as performed in roles: the privilege of some people to ignore others and the defenses the subordinates may use to preserve dignity. (58-59)

Matt, considered a non-person, is ignored by virtually everyone living on the Alacrán estate, with the exception of El Patrón, Celia, his only friend Maria,⁶ and his bodyguard Tam Lin, which is indeed indicative of dimensions of power at play in the novel. The main problem with Matt's role as a non-person is that he was raised thinking he was a normal boy. Although Farmer never reveals the details as to how Celia becomes Matt's caregiver and savior, readers learn that Matt has no memory of life without Celia. In the beginning of the novel, and until Matt is six years of age, Celia and Matt live in a small shack in the middle of El Patrón's opium fields. Matt grows up an only child, raised to be kind and loving by a very religious Celia. When Matt is discovered, by the curious grandchildren of El Patrón and children of Senator Mendoza, his life changes completely. Suddenly, Matt is regarded and treated as a wild animal—not the sweet, intelligent young boy Celia was raising him to be.

After his discovery and integration back into the lives of the Alacrás, Matt adjusts to how others treat him. However, Matt never truly believes in the role he has been cast in – he feels as if he is human. Matt does become resigned to his fate as a clone, until he learns the true nature behind this role: to be the living organ donor for El Patrón. Matt is devastated to learn that his entire life he has been groomed in order to act as a savior for a 140 year old evil patriarch who should have died decades ago. Sadly, almost too late, Matt realizes that he absolutely does not believe in his assigned role as clone and

⁶ Maria is the daughter of Senator Mendoza, a powerful US Senator under the control of El Patrón

that he is unable to do as he is told – experiencing multiple moments of performance consciousness. Matt had spent so many years of his life rejecting his socially and biologically assigned role and asserting himself into the role of human that he completely had missed the signs regarding the true nature of his fate:

So many hints! So many clues! Like a pebble that starts an avalanche, Matt's fear shook loose more and more memories. Why had Tam Lin given him a chest full of supplies and maps? Why had Maria run from him when they found MacGregor's clone in the hospital? Because she knew! They all knew! Matt's education and accomplishments were a sham. It didn't matter how intelligent he was. In the end the only thing that mattered was how strong his *heart* was. (Farmer, 216, emphasis in original)

Upon El Patrón's death, due to the clever subterfuge of Celia, Matt is finally able to discard his assigned roles, of clone and organ donor. However, Matt cannot continue to live in Opium. The Alacrán family still regards him as an animal, as such Matt makes a daring escape (with the help of Tam Lin) through the Opium fields and across the border to Azatlan. It is in Azatlan that Matt is at last able to perform the roles of his own choosing: human boy and kind leader. Like Jonas, Matt has no choice but to change his setting in order to seek out the role(s) that allow him to believe in himself and his position within society.

Ultimately, Jonas and Matt gain control over the roles they choose to play by changing their settings. In the article "Drama as Life: The Significance of Goffman's Changing Use of the Theatrical Metaphor," Phil Manning suggests that "...performances

are both realized and idealized as our all-too human selves are transformed into socialized beings capable of expressive control" (75). Not believing in the parts they were cast in forced Jonas and Matt to transform into beings who could function in a social setting and then eventually control it – meaning that they developed power. In her book *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that "Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own power and by the power of the social forces that surround them . . ." (7). As such, Matt and Jonas eventually are liberated from their assigned roles because of their reactions to the repressive power structures within their own lives.

Mo Willems, a popular author of children's literature, recently wrote a book entitled *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs*. Indeed, Willems' re-telling of a classic fairy tale is a far cry from the dystopias of Lowry and Farmer. However, Willems includes a moral at the end of his story that aligns itself very closely with the strong thread that runs through *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion*: "If you ever find yourself in the wrong story, leave" (27). Perhaps the moral that dystopian YAL provides its readers is this: "If you ever find yourself cast in the wrong role, use your power and re-cast yourself." Performative consciousness in *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* allows readers to take note of characters experiencing moments of self-doubt as well as liberation, arguably moments many adolescents experience in their own lives. Literature often provides readers with characters unaware of their role performances, similar to how people in real life often fail to realize their own role performances, but when read through

the lens of performance theory, performative consciousness becomes evident as a major factor in decision making for both fictional characters and real people.

Jonas and Matt are similar to many YAL characters because they both exhibit identity formation in progress. In fact, many YAL texts "resist models of 'fixed' identities, making identities not nouns but verbs, actions, self-activations"(Thompson 133). *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* are texts that allow audiences to question the process of identity in that they accentuate the gap that exists between appearances and reality. Jonas's community appears to be a perfect utopia, but upon closer inspection readers discover it is heartless and cruel. Matt appears to be a normal teenage boy to readers, yet people living on the Alacrán estate consider him a monstrous animal. Indeed, appearance is a troubling aspect of adolescence – arguably many young adults envision themselves differently than how others view them.

In performance theory, appearance "...involves dress, gender, age, size, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, gestures – all the cues that combine to create the impression of a social role and its status" (Bell 152). An appearance is a component of a social front – a social front is a combination of setting, appearance and manner.⁷ What social fronts ultimately do is allow people to achieve an ideal (that is usually socially specific). Goffman suggests that "a performance is 'socialized,' molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (35). When Jonas and Matt's performances of their assigned roles no longer fit into the expectations of their societies, due to their manners and appearances, they have no other choice but to seek out new locations – locales that will allow them to perform roles and

⁷ Manner is the enactment of attitude that accompanies social cues (Bell 152).

fronts in a more socially acceptable setting. Often in dystopian YAL, many characters must leave the controlling society in order to live in the way in which they feel is right. Indeed, this notion can be considered problematic as it does seem to convey the meaning that in order for people to embrace their true identities a removal from society is required. However, the larger argument in regard to removing oneself from a poisonous setting is relevant. Ultimately, what performance does in both Lowry and Farmer's texts is to make readers aware of the many possibilities that exist in the process of identity formation; performance allows for a "breathing space between the world of common meanings and the world of alternative ones, a space of potential renewal for thought, desire, and action" (Brown 574). Performance allows characters to separate emotions from reality – enabling a character to appear emotionally stable in his social circle while internally processing feelings, thoughts, and desires.

Transforming Identity through Emotional Performance

Arguably, many people read literature in order to vicariously experience emotional states – happiness, sadness, terror, suspense. YAL does indeed often produce emotional texts that affect readers. Adolescence itself can be considered an emotional time in a person's life, a time when many young people are discovering who they are and seeking to assert their own ideology. Elaine Ostry suggests that YAL writers:

...use the literary tropes of young adult literature (and adolescence itself) to show the complexities of the coming age: the search for identity and sense of self, the discovery of the lie, the separation between parent and child, the formation of new peer groups, resistance to adult control,

decision making, growth and adaptation, and the challenge of hierarchies.

(223)

As such, dystopian YAL is relevant to many emotions young adults are experiencing. Emotions often trigger reactions that cause many young adults to make transformational decisions in regards to their lives. Jonas and Matt both experience strong emotional feelings that lead them to make life altering decisions, which eventually enables each character to reject the role they have been assigned. Indeed, emotions are often considered catalysts for decision-making and action, in YAL as well as real life. However, in *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* emotional performance is multi-faceted, it does indeed result in decision making but also calls attention to the various degrees in which performative emotions affect social interaction. Emotions are often, but not always, easy to read because they generally appear through body language and facial expressions, which Goffman argues are performances. Performance is defined by Goffman as: "...all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (15). Goffman suggests that there are two distinct types of emotional performance: cynical and sincere. A cynical performance is a show of emotion that is self-serving and manipulative. A sincere performance is considered something that is heartfelt – honest expressions (facial and body language) of emotion to convey news and meaning for the benefit of an audience. People can give emotions and give off emotions; giving emotions generally means through language and giving off emotions is through facial expression, posture, eye contact, etc. (Bell 150). In *The Giver* and *The House of the Scorpion* characters perform both cynical and sincere

emotions, which proves to be pivotal in how Jonas and Matt both finally discard their assigned roles.

Jonas's early years, before the ceremony of twelve,⁸ were what could be considered emotionless – although he did not realize this at the time. His community encouraged the sharing of feelings in order to appear closer to one another, but the process itself only seems to lessen the feelings and emotions, making them seem routine and unimportant. Thus the community as a collective appears to display cynical emotions – a manipulative use of emotions in order to control a population. Each evening families in Jonas's community share their feelings at the dinner table:

'Who wants to be the first tonight, for feelings?' Jonas's father asked, at the conclusion of their evening meal. It was one of the rituals, the evening telling of feelings. Sometimes Jonas and his sister, Lily, argued over turns, over who would get to go first. Their parents, of course, were part of the ritual; they, too, told their feelings each evening...His (Jonas's) feelings were too complicated this evening. He wanted to share them, but he wasn't eager to begin the process of sifting through his own complicated emotions, even with the help that he knew his parents would give. (Lowry 5)

In this particular instance Jonas has experienced extreme feelings of fright after an aircraft has flown over the community (an unexpected and baffling occurrence), causing the community elders to insist everyone abandon their activities and seek shelter. Jonas is nervous to discuss this event with his family because he is not sure if he can commit his

⁸ In the ceremony of twelve children in Jonas's community are assigned their future occupation and start training for their new career and life.

emotions to words. Jonas believes that precise language, as his community refers to words, would not fit the emotion he was feeling, which makes his emotion appear insincere. In the community the sharing of feelings is used to not only control the people but to also remove the emotional response from the feeling, therefore feelings in Jonas's community are almost always cynical, and used to manipulate the people. Any emotion Jonas expresses is eventually lessened through the precise language the community attaches to it. Jonas's assigned role in the community, prior to the ceremony of twelve, is that of a child who is encouraged to (through the use of precise language) remove the emotional aspect of feeling from his behavior and thought process. By assigning precise language to words, Jonas's community partakes in the act of informing its citizens how they feel, socially constructing a word for every emotion, which only lessens the power of the feeling. In his book, *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams argues that feeling is often based on a form of social consciousness and states:

Practical consciousness is almost always different from official consciousness, and this is not only a matter of relative freedom or control. For practical consciousness is what is actually being lived, and not only what it is thought is being lived...It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. Its relations with the already articulate and defined are then exceptionally complex. (131)

Jonas's feelings are indeed in an embryonic stage of practical consciousness until he is forced to share them with this family, catapulting these feelings into official consciousness – where precise language is assigned to his emotions, therefore lessening

his feelings. Feelings and emotions are common in most YAL texts, they are not solely dystopian YAL traits. However, emotions in dystopian literature are often triggered by extreme situations that produce intense results. Many times characters are not allowed to perform certain emotions because of confines of their dystopic setting. As such, many characters in YAL dystopian texts will construct and form identities that allow them to express their feelings and emotions when their assigned identities do not allow for this freedom. The notion of performative consciousness (practical and official) and its impact on social control is especially relevant to tropes that exist within dystopia literature (a genre recognized for control and resistance). Reading YAL dystopia with performative consciousness in mind affords for a rich study in regard to appearance and reality, and also provides a glimpse as to how characters articulate and define their social experiences with one another in situations where the freedom to feel is limited.

When Jonas begins his training as the new Receiver, he begins to feel and experience new emotions, through the Giver's transference of memory. Jonas is instructed, by the elders of the community, to not speak of his training with anyone, not even his family. By being able to keep his feelings to himself and process them, Jonas begins to finally experience sincere emotions. Thus, Jonas's feelings evolve on their own, not through the structured control of the community. Eventually, he finds himself unable to live in the community with his former friends and family who are unable to feel emotion in the way that he does. Thus, Jonas's opportunity to experience sincere emotion and practical consciousness are pivotal in his resistance of his assigned identity.

Matt differs from Jonas in that his emotions are always sincere, but he does interact with other characters in the story who express solely cynical forms of emotion.

Matt, who is considered a social outcast, always expresses his emotions; due to his status as a clone, very few people interact with Matt. The people that do interact with Matt (Tam Lin, Celia, and Maria) all become used to his frequent emotional outbursts – as a non-person and outsider he has never had to comply with social emotional rules, as Jonas does in *The Giver*. However, Matt does frequently witness people expressing themselves through cynical emotional performance. El Patrón often tells his childhood story, one of sorrow and poverty – yet there is no emotion in the telling. Rather, El Patrón uses the tale of his sad childhood to garner respect and awe from his family. Dystopian societies often assume power and control by manipulating the emotions of their citizens. Many characters within YAL dystopian texts experience emotion because of strategic maneuvers set in place by the controlling society. In *The House of the Scorpion* there are many characters who use emotional manipulation to solidify their place within the family as well as control others. Tom, El Patrón's illegitimate great-grandchild, uses his emotions to manipulate and control Maria. Matt observes Tom perform certain emotions in order to gain the love and trust of his childhood friend. Tom, a sociopathic character, appears unable to express any emotion other than anger – which is witnessed solely by Matt. In the novel, Maria's dog disappears. Tom and Matt both join the search to help Maria find him, but then Matt realizes something was not quite right about Tom's assistance: "Tom was searching, but he didn't seem to be really *looking*. It was hard to describe. Tom was going through the motions, but all the while his eyes were watching Maria" (Farmer, 95, emphasis in original). In this moment, Matt has caught Tom in a cynical performance: Tom is not really looking for the dog, because he is the one that harmed and hid the animal. Matt is able to sense that Tom's performance is not sincere

and completely self-motivated. Surrounded by many characters who are emotionally cynical performers, prompts Matt to desire a change in setting. When El Patrón dies, Matt leaves Opium and is able to discard his assigned identity of clone and seek out a social atmosphere in which people express sincere emotion – thus, Matt's emotional performance, and those he witnesses, are also pivotal in his rejection of his assigned role and formation of new roles. Matt and Jonas's sincere emotional performances reveal that it is only through moving beyond cynical emotional performance that characters, and real people, can take on/form roles and identities that allow for successful navigation of stressful settings. However, cynical performances should not be discounted as they often serve to protect characters in the throes of identity formation.

The Giver and *The House of the Scorpion* feature characters struggling with role assignment, performative consciousness, and emotional manipulation. Jonas and Matt are assigned roles and eventually discard them when they become aware of emotional realities. Scholars often argue as to whether literature really *does* anything, if it truly serves a purpose. Arguably, what YAL does is to provide readers with characters who construct identities through role performance. These role performances enable characters to assume control in their own fictional lives, better navigate dystopian settings, and more successfully process stressors. Young adult readers of YAL dystopian texts struggle with stressful situations, and settings, that can trigger strong emotional responses; thus, YAL provides these readers with prime examples of how to maneuver upsetting emotions, controlled settings, and assigned identities.

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Chapter 2

Performing Resistance in the Epic Theater of *The Hunger Games*

"Where there is Power, there is Resistance..." Michel Foucault

In 2008, Suzanne Collins's bestselling novel, *The Hunger Games*, took the nation by storm; adults, young adults, and children were reading this dystopian work with fervor. Collins had rejuvenated dystopian literature. The story of Katniss Everdeen revitalized the sub-genre, sparking a dystopian trend in YAL. However, popularity of this type of literature, and the Hunger Games series itself, should not be surprising as many attributes of dystopia can be compared to tropes of adolescence. Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, editors of *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, claim that dystopian writing is perfectly suited for YAL due to the nature of adolescence, stating:

...adolescence frequently entails traumatic social and personal awakening. The adolescent comes to recognize the faults and weaknesses of his or her society. A common trope in such literature is the emphasis on the lie, the secret and unsavory workings of the society that the teen hero uncovers. Dystopian literature thus mingles well with the coming-of-age novel, which features a loss of innocence. (9)

Katniss Everdeen's journey from District 12 to the Capitol of Panem is chock-full of traumatic awakenings, social and personal. Readers quickly find themselves experiencing the Games through the first person, present tense, narrative of Katniss. Collins's writing in this style affects her readers because they begin to feel as if they are experiencing the games alongside their heroine. Readers witness Katniss performing many roles

throughout the novel – roles that Katniss is always keenly aware that she is playing. In the Gamemakers arena, which can be thought of as a stage (because it is painstakingly designed and produced), Katniss knowingly performs the roles of: hero, killer, lover, and fan favorite in order to assume control of her situation and survive the Games. By writing Katniss in this way, Collins provides audiences with a character who utilizes performance as power in order to achieve social, and personal, change. This notion is particularly powerful for young adult readers to witness, in that it allows them to recognize role performance in their own lives – which can assist young adults in successfully navigating their own social settings. The idea of performance as power to encourage social change is a component of Epic Theater; thus, *The Hunger Games* can be compared to epic theater because it is written in such a way that mimics this type of performance. Collins's series also serves as an example as to how young adults engage in "the art of making do"¹ (Certeau 30) within unjust structures of power – and successfully perform resistance.

Dystopia is commonly recognized as a genre that features elements such as strict governmental control, high technology, futuristic settings, and rebellion; *The Hunger Games* includes all four of these genre-specific components – with strict governmental control pulsing at the heart of the story. The text is set in Panem, a country located in the ruins of North America, which is made up of twelve districts and a controlling Capitol. In order to control and wield its power over its citizens, the government holds an annual event known as the Hunger Games. During these Games citizens who reside in all twelve districts must offer two of their children, ages twelve to eighteen, up as tributes to the

¹ Michel de Certeau coined the term "art of making do" in order to explain how people use tactics to overcome strategic maneuvers—or how they manipulate events in order to change them into opportunities.

Capitol. Tributes engage in a nationally broadcasted fight to the death in an arena designed and controlled by the Capitol, where there can only be one victor. Katniss Everdeen, the sixteen-year-old heroine who offers herself as tribute in the stead of her younger sister, finds herself in the Games attempting to not only survive but also appear genuine and likeable for the citizens of the Capitol. People living in the Capitol find great excitement and joy in the games, and often select tributes to support by sending much desired gifts into the arena in times of need; citizens in the Capitol can be compared to people who cheer for contestants on *Survivor* and other similar reality TV shows.

Reality TV was one of the inspirations for The Hunger Games series. In fact, Suzanne Collins first thought of the concept for her novel while watching a reality show. In an interview with James Blasingame, Collins states:

The very moment when the idea came to me for *The Hunger Games*, however, happened one night when I was very tired and I was laying in bed channel surfing. I happened upon a reality program, recorded live, that pitted young people against each other for money. As I sleepily watched, the lines of reality started to blur for me and the idea for the book emerged...I am fearful that today people see so many reality shows and dramas that when real news is on, its impact is completely lost on them.

(Blasingame and Collins 727)

By situating her novel within the dystopian sub-genre, and by including a televised Hunger Games reminiscent of current reality TV culture, Collins provides readers with an opportunity to vicariously experience a character transitioning and performing resistance in a post-modern epic theater.

Epic Theater

Bertolt Brecht, a political philosopher, dramatist, and theatre practitioner, is most famous for theories that rejected "realism in acting and Aristotelian dramatic form... Brecht argued that theatre can be a forum for social and ideological change" (Bell 201). Brecht's theory of theater is based in three radical concerns: attention to the realities and assumptions of social relations, most especially class conflicts; commitment to staging and acting techniques that refuse to engage in mimetic representations; and the production of audiences who are critical observers moved to enact social and political change (71). Further explicating his concept of "Epic theater," Brecht encouraged actors and audiences to "...remain aware of how any performance is at once bound by historical and social contexts and changing," providing an opportunity for cultural critique and ideally inspiring spectators to exclaim: "This cannot be! Who would have thought this was possible! This treatment has to stop, they offend me, and these behaviors must end" (70, 71). Brecht encouraged actors and audiences to "...remain aware of how any performance is at once bound by historical and social contexts and changing" (70). He also believed that although performances are often constructed, they provide powerful ways in which to view life and the world.

Theatre that operates in this manner was termed Epic Theatre by Brecht; Epic Theatre appeals to reason and allows audiences to think in new ways.² This type of theatre often does the following: arouses the audience's capacity for action, forces the audience to make decisions, presents a picture of the world, makes the audience face

² The dramatic theatre is the opposite of Epic theatre in that it seeks to gain emotional connection with its viewers. Spectators of this type of theater often feel as if they can relate to the characters and the emotions these characters experience. Dramatic theater is not considered a platform for social change (like Epic Theatre is).

something, brings an audience to a point of recognition, and the audience often stands outside the action and studies. Epic Theatre is also known as theatre that breaks the fourth wall (Bell 203), keeps emotions in check, makes strange, and provides arresting moments. In *The Hunger Games* Collins appropriates many Brechtian techniques without forcing her text to conform to the totality of all of Brecht's theories. As such, Collins's text is written in the style of Epic Theatre which causes its readers to experience similar emotions to those that would have been experienced in a Brechtian production. The Arena, cunningly designed by Capitol Gamemakers, serves as the stage that provides arresting moments which cause some people living in Panem to seek action against the Capitol; the fast paced horror of the Games also affects readers of Collins's series, causing them to inwardly address atrocities and contemplate the immediate need for social change (in real and fictional worlds).

While reading *The Hunger Games* it is almost impossible not to feel as if the events are unfolding right before one's eyes. Collins's use of first-person, present tense, enables readers to feel as if they are living in the same moments as Katniss. By writing in this manner, Collins develops arresting moments for her audience. According to Elizabeth Bell, a performance theorist, "arresting moments seek to break the linear flow of the narrative and identification with the story" (204), making the story appear real and present. Deirdre Baker's article "Present Tensions, or It's All Happening Now" addresses the use of present tense as a strategic arresting moment, suggesting that:

In this way the present tense is a layer of concealment over the writer's influence on the way the story is told, and on the fact that to tell it, the writer has taken a stand. The present tense is a reportage or live drama:

every present tense verb is a step into nothing, into a tale that must make itself up from moment to moment. A Tweet, perhaps. A Facebook comment. Or even a reality TV – happening right now before your eyes (Baker n. pag.)

When Katniss volunteers as tribute for her younger sister Prim, during the reaping ceremony, the narrative is gripping and arresting, "Prim is screaming hysterically behind me. She's wrapped her skinny arms around me like a vice. 'No, Katniss! No! You can't go!'" (Collins 23). Present tense leaves the reader feeling as if they are with Katniss and experiencing her horrible tragedy. A reader becomes a spectator and observer and also becomes keenly, and intensely, aware of the unjust nature of the Games.

Present tense is perfectly suited in literature written for young adults in that it does indeed exude the "adolescent nowness" mentality (Baker n.pag.). Young adults have the tendency to solely live in the now, not thinking of their futures but instead making decisions in the moment. Often when making quick decisions young adults have no idea what the costs will be for their actions. Collins's use of present tense echoes the sometimes rash decision making of real adolescents, which can result in consequences that force them to perform and construct roles that better allow them to handle their actions. This notion can be seen in the novel when Katniss loses her temper and behaves aggressively while being evaluated by the Gamemakers during her training sessions: "Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Gamemakers' table. I hear shouts of alarm as people stumble back. The arrow skewers the apple in the pig's mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief" (Collins 102). At that moment Katniss is filled with anger, disbelief, and

frustration, yet she must prove to the Gamemakers that she acted this way to show them how good she is. Thus, Katniss must perform the role of a strong competitor on the outside, while on the inside she is a terrified young girl. "The [elevator] doors slide together and I zip upward. I actually make it back to my floor before the tears start running down my cheeks" (Collins 103). Arguably, young adults recognize in Katniss the same impulsive behavior that they too exhibit, and are able to identify with their heroine in a more intense way. Katniss acted in a rash manner when she shot the arrow at the Gamemakers feast, but outwardly she maintained her composure and her action looked strategically planned. As such, Katniss is able to perform a strong character that allows her to hide the emotions she inwardly feels.

Emotional restraint is not a common characteristic of adolescence, but it is however a component of Epic Theatre which sheds light on Collins's characterization of Katniss. According to Bell, "Performers separate themselves from the characters they play by keeping their emotions 'in check' and working to stay emotionally detached in performance. This is not to say the performance is void of emotion, but rather that the performer and character do not become one" (203). In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss plays roles in a similar way. There exists a tension between who Katniss thinks and knows she is and who she is performing for everyone else. Due to the death of her father and near catatonic state of her mother, Katniss is required to play different roles from a very young age; she acts as sole provider for the family, stand-in parent(s) to Prim, and nursemaid to her mother. The poverty in district twelve requires Katniss to become quick witted, a skilled hunter, and a masterful strategist – which allow her to perform in different ways throughout her lifetime. Thus, Katniss indeed separates herself from the many roles she

plays. Due to Collins's use of first person point of view, readers are attune to Katniss's inner thoughts and feelings, and are easily able to spot when she is performing for the sake of survival. Katniss is not often thought of as a killer, although she does kill many times in the story, she herself is never branded as a killer. This is because Katniss frequently keeps her emotions in check and often appears so composed that some readers have considered her verging on emotionless. Instead of appearing angry with the Capitol, Katniss is able to remain composed and unfazed – allowing her to internally strategize her next move without her emotions giving away her motives.

Collins's choice to allow Katniss to keep most of her emotions in check allows readers to disassociate Katniss' actions with cold-blooded murder. By having her inner thoughts conflict drastically with her staged performance, Collins allows readers to identify Katniss with her interior self – a person who inwardly struggles with justifying the killing of other tributes. When Katniss and Peeta manage to knock Career tribute Cato off of the Cornucopia, near the end of the Games, a reader learns that Katniss kills Cato not out of spite or fury, but instead pity:

It takes a few moments to find Cato in the dim light, in the blood. Then the raw hunk of meat that used to be my enemy makes a sound, and I know where his mouth is. And I think the word he's trying to say is *please*. Pity, not vengeance, sends my arrow flying into his skull.

(Collins 340-341, emphasis in original)

Indeed, Katniss kills to survive, but those actions are almost instantly forgiven by the audience of Panem as well as by readers. Tributes in *The Hunger Games* who do not keep their emotions in check are easily identified as possessing certain character traits that

label them villain or hero. Cato, the career tribute from district one, revels in his murderous triumphs and is thus thought of as a killer. Peeta is thought of as a weak character by many simply because he readily expresses emotion. Rue is instantly endeared to everyone because of her sweet nature and emotional relationship with Katniss; her ability to appear especially sweet and childlike makes her death much more tragic for Katniss and the people of Panem. Katniss performs the role of a killer but this character is not Katniss's sole role – readers experience Katniss performing a multitude of roles that do not pigeonhole her character.

The critical distance between Katniss and her emotions allows readers to question the construction of not only the characters in the text, but also the dystopic conditions surrounding them. Ultimately, this component of Epic Theatre used by Collins serves as a powerful agent in how audiences react to and are inspired by Katniss Everdeen. This element of Epic Theatre can also be witnessed in reality TV, which, as mentioned earlier, Collins used as inspiration for her Hunger Games series. Reality TV is aggressively performative and indeed often far from “reality.” Characters are often seen in difficult situations, emotionally and physically, but will then be filmed as if they are “talking” to the audience in monologue style – appearing to break the fourth wall.

Brecht is most commonly known for creating the phrase “breaking the fourth wall.” In theatre, performers break the fourth wall by addressing audience members directly. This technique is particularly interesting in a novel because it momentarily disrupts the action and can, for a moment, give readers a break from the battle at hand. Breaking the fourth wall also gives audiences (citizens of Panem) and readers the opportunity to become aware that they, too, are a part of the action – their actions affect

those of the performers and the performers are watching them. In *The Hunger Games*, Panem audience members can affect the lives of tributes in the arena by sending well-timed and much-needed gifts that aid a tribute in a time of distress. Tributes in the arena are aware of the possibility of receiving gifts from fans and will sometimes perform in such a way as to encourage these presents. When Peeta is in need of nourishment and medicine after his leg is injured, Katniss decides to play the star-crossed lover in order to earn Peeta the lifesaving materials he needs. Directly after tending to a wounded Peeta, which involved much kissing, Katniss steps out of their hideout to see if her performance garnered her any attention:

I step out in the cool evening air just as the parachute floats down from the sky. My fingers quickly undo the tie, hoping for some real medicine to treat Peeta's leg. Instead I find a pot of hot broth. Haymitch couldn't be sending me a clearer message. One kiss equals one pot of broth. I can almost hear his snarl. 'You're supposed to be in love, sweetheart. The boy's dying. Give me something I can work with!' (Collins 261)

Although Katniss is not watching the audience members of Panem, the audience members are watching her and certainly believe that they are a part of the action when they are able to assist their favorite tributes, and afford their favorite tributes better chances to survive and win the Games. The first person point of view narrative Collins uses also makes it possible for audience members to feel as if they are a part of the action or that Katniss is speaking directly to them. When Katniss is severely burned in the forest fire set by the Gamemakers, her only chance at escaping a band of Career tributes is by climbing high into a tree. Katniss informs readers that "There's a reason why it's me and

not Gale who ventures up to pluck the highest fruit, or rob the most remote bird nests. I must weigh at least fifty or sixty pounds less than the smallest Career" (Collins 181). Katniss also acknowledges the presence of the audience of Panem soon after climbing the tree: "Now I smile. 'How's everything with you?' I call down cheerfully. This takes them aback, but I know the crowd will love it" (Collins 181). First person point of view allows readers to become more invested in the story, to feel as if Katniss is confiding in them; Katniss's awareness of, and performance for, her Panem audience provides them with this very same feeling.

The Games are broadcast live, but the Gamemakers choose what parts of the Games they want to highlight by focusing in on, or partially avoid by cutting away. The broadcast is also frequently interrupted by Cesar Flickerman's commentary and discussion about the action in the Games. These stylistic camera movements and commentary breaks provide the emotionally involved audiences of Panem with cliffhanger moments, and also give them much needed interruption from the horrific Games. Similar to the captive audience of Panem, it is not unusual for readers to become emotionally vested in the lives of fictional characters; for this reason, writers will often end a chapter in an intense way in order to provide readers with moments in which to emotionally process events that have occurred – which is formally known as a chapter break.

Chapter breaks serve as "self-contained narrative units" that stop the emotional flow of the novel and allow readers to think critically about the text and form sound judgments (Bell 205), much like natural breaks in a conversation. At the end of chapter 9

in *The Hunger Games* it is revealed to Caesar Flickerman that Peeta has a crush on Katniss and has had one for a long time:

Peeta sighs. 'Well, there is this one girl. I've had a crush on her ever since I can remember. But I'm pretty sure she didn't know I was alive until the reaping.' Sounds of sympathy from the crowd. Unrequited love they can relate to...'I don't think it's going to work out. Winning...won't help in my case,' says Peeta. 'Why ever not?' says Caesar, mystified. Peeta blushes beet red and stammers out. 'Because...because...she came here with me.'
(Collins 138)

The very next page is blank except for the following words: "Part II 'The Games.'"

Readers have just learned that Peeta loves Katniss and has for quite some time, and the next page is silence. By stopping the emotional flow of the novel by writing relatively short chapters with guaranteed page-turner endings, Collins allows readers the space and time to think critically about what has happened and what is to come. Chapter 10 starts as follows:

For a moment, the cameras hold on Peeta's downcast eyes as what he says sinks in. Then I can see my face, mouth half open in a mix of surprise and protest, magnified on every screen as I realize, *Me! He means me!* I press my lips together and stare at the floor, hoping this will conceal the emotions starting to boil up inside of me. (Collins, 133, emphasis in original)

Readers are now able to continue Katniss's story, having spent a small amount of time critically thinking about the repercussions of Peeta's confession and can thus better gauge

Katniss's reactions, which causes the reader to become more invested in the story.

Therefore, many characteristics of Epic Theatre invite readers of YAL, which has been written in this style, to become more engaged, active, emotionally responsive, and serious spectators.

Resistance

Much of Brecht's work applies to actual theatre and the effect productions have upon their audiences. Performance, however, is not limited to the stage or television and can be found not only in literature but in real life – most especially the notion of performing resistance. According to Bell:

A cursory look at the evening news quickly demonstrates that when citizens are actively engaged in public debates, they often take their concerns to the streets – chanting, marching, waving signs, and staging 'events' for media that broadcast the sounds and images around the world. The aesthetics of these events – orchestrated as spectacle, as drama, as conflict, through media – and the political realities that prompt them demand that resistance and performance belong in the same sentence. (199)

Naturally before there can be resistance there must be a controlling force wielding power. In Collins's novels, the Capitol exercises what Michel Foucault refers to as traditional understandings of power. This type of power can be compared to ancient Roman power structures. Foucault suggests that traditional power is acquired, seized, held or lost; is enacted and enforced by laws that for the most part strictly inform citizens what they cannot do; divides people into groups of either ruler or ruled; is often found in strict class

systems; is oppressive and assumes the right to lord over others (94). Traditional power is frequently referred to as repressive power and is viewed as a power that seeks to punish and wound (94).

An inherent component of dystopia is the presence of a controlling force, commonly a government, which separates characters into groups: rulers and ruled. Resistance generally beats at the heart of a dystopian novel and drives the story; this notion is evident in the Hunger Games series. People living in Panem have been separated from one another – living in assigned districts and not allowed to communicate with other people in the country. Few people living in the districts ever venture outside their fenced community, and if they do it is in order to provide food (by illegally hunting it) for their families, participate in the Hunger Games, or because of Capitol imprisonment/punishment. People who break the rules of Panem are punished severely – often transformed into avoxes³

The strategic segregation of the citizens of Panem (into districts) prohibits discussion, thus rebellion, in regard to the repressive power that is the Capitol. In Katniss's home District twelve, the people do not band together to fight the Capitol, but they do work together to run a black market called the Hob. Although this black market exists almost solely due to necessity and is not described as a meeting place for a resistance group, the banding together of the people in this way is indeed a form of resistance. Thus, Katniss has become accustomed to resistance since her early youth, learning that resistance ultimately means survival.

³ An avox is a person who broke a Capitol law and has their tongue cut out and is then forced into slavery, usually these avoxes live in the Capitol and serve the people there. Katniss encounters an avox while staying in the Capitol and realizes that she has seen this girl before, when the young lady was attempting an escape from her district prior to the Games.

Katniss very publicly expresses her power by taking control of her own life, thus removing that control from President Snow and the Capitol, throughout the novel. The first instance she does this is by offering herself as tribute in exchange for her sister Prim. Indeed, in Panem citizens can offer themselves as tribute in place of another person, but this rarely has happened. It is true that at this particular moment Katniss is not thinking about mocking Capitol power, she simply yearns to save the life of her sister. However, by asserting her own power of choice (by taking Prim's place) Katniss begins a control-taking process that continues throughout the Hunger Games series. By taking control of her own fate – Katniss scorns the random selection of tributes and the Games as well.

Upon taking Prim's place, Katniss endears herself to the people in her district but also Effie Trinket – the Capitol escort for District twelve:

'Well, bravo!' gushes Effie Trinket. 'That's the spirit of the Games!' She's pleased to finally have a district with a little action going on in it. 'I bet your buttons that was your sister. Don't want her to steal all the glory, do we? Come on, everybody! Let's give a big round of applause to our newest tribute!' trills Effie Trinket. To the everlasting credit of the people of District 12, not one person claps. So instead of acknowledging applause, I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. (Collins 24)

Katniss has become a symbol of hope for Effie, because the escort desires to represent a champion, and a symbol of resistance to her district members. Katniss's self-sacrifice also allows her to assume some control of the Games from the start, positioning herself as a soon-to-be media darling. Indeed her maneuver is a heartfelt gesture meant to save her

baby sister, however it also serves as a strong example of her character. This self-sacrifice is a first for District 12 – not one person from her district had ever offered themselves as tribute in the place of another. Historically, tributes accept the fate of their random selection during the Reaping. Katniss, however, refuses to allow Prim to compete in the Games. Her character is one that has been resisting unjust authority for many years: she has had to survive exceptionally difficult circumstances since the death of her father, illegally hunt outside the District border to provide food for her mother and sister, and repeatedly break Capitol laws to help other people in the District survive as well. Thus, Katniss's character is that of a rebel. As she becomes more comfortable asserting her personal power she becomes a powerful player in the Games and adversary of the Capitol.

Katniss also thwarts the Capitol, and mocks the Games, by taking the time to mourn when Rue is killed. When Rue, Katniss' eleven-year-old ally from District 11 dies, Katniss is greatly grieved. Arguably, Rue was always destined to die, after all there can only be one winner of the Hunger Games; however, her death is still shocking and graphically violent. A grief-stricken Katniss holds Rue while she dies, singing an old mountain air learned from her father, in order to comfort the child. Wracked with grief, Katniss remembers words Peeta had spoken to her before the games "Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to...to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games" (Collins 236), Katniss finally understands what Peeta meant by these words. Thus, Katniss becomes fueled with the fire to avenge not only Rue but all of the other children who have died before her.

All of Katniss's actions are recorded and televised by the Gamemakers. Knowing this fact she takes great pains to make Rue look beautiful in death – gathering wildflowers and arranging them in a respectful way. Katniss does this because she wants to:

...do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I. (Collins 237)

Not only do these actions endear Katniss to the audience of Panem, and readers, but they also reflect how Katniss uses her power to bring social injustices to light. Katniss exhibits what Foucault describes as productive power, which is counteractive to traditional/oppressive power. According to Foucault, productive power is not seized and is always changing; is produced within and among relationships; runs through a social body as a whole, is intentional, and is always associated with resistance (94). The character of Katniss can also be visualized as a tactic. De Certeau, philosopher and scholar, wrote about how personal agency plays a powerful part in resistance and wrote many theories that discuss how people imaginatively and energetically navigate cultural structures and class systems. According to de Certeau, structures of power can be separated into two groups: strategy and tactic. De Certeau claims that strategies are rules designed by controlling governments that are meant to manipulate and impose, and tactics are "bodily practices of real people that create space in between, around, and through these structures, rules, and regulations" (30). As such, tactics⁴ are physical

⁴ de Certeau also claims that a person, not just their decisions, can be a tactic.

actions, implemented by characters, which are seen as modes of unpredictable and improvisational power. A character who is considered a tactic is typically on guard, and according to de Certeau, "always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' What it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities" (xix). When Katniss blows up the food and weapon source Cato and his small alliance had been amassing as a trap, she not only takes advantage of an opportunity for her gain, but she also understands that this small victory will be fleeting.

The small victories that Katniss wins in the arena, mourning Rue, saving Peeta, and engineering the first ever two victor Games, are short-lived because, as a tactic (a character who uses their physical activity to thwart strategy), she must return home to her impoverished and strictly controlled district after the Games where nothing will change. Indeed, Katniss will be the hero of District 12 but the lives of the people living there will continue to be impoverished and sad.

Not only is Katniss forced to return to her district as hero and symbol of resistance, she must live the rest of her life knowing that the Capitol (especially President Snow) is monitoring her closely. Her victory is momentary, frightening, and fleeting. De Certeau proposes that tactics who take advantage of situations for their benefit are practicing the "art of making do" (30). In the Hunger Games series, readers watch Katniss "make do" repeatedly by reading about her life before the Games, the Games, her life as a victor, the return to the arena in *Catching Fire*, how she becomes a revolutionary symbol, and the way in which she defeats all figures wielding repressive power at the end of *Mockingjay*. Katniss performs resistance frequently in all three novels, by making

symbolic gestures such as wearing the Mockingjay pin and using her district salute – she is a tactic that is attempting to defeat a Capitol strategy, and by watching her performance the people of Panem slowly begin to realize that they too can harness progressive power and act as tactics as well.

Performances of power are witnessed frequently in today's media. Collins's novel, heavily impacted by the current trend of reality television, is situated perfectly in current culture which has been described by Janelle Reinheld, a performance theorist, as "aggressively theatrical" (71). People living today are frequently exposed to performance through televised live events and spectacles. Reinheld claims that events that impact the daily activities of an audience, attract significant media attention, appear ceremonial or ritualistic, and endorse nationalism are events that are inherently performative (74). In today's culture, events like breaking news announcements, presidential inaugurations, and even the singing of the National Anthem before a baseball game can all be thought of as performances that impact audiences.

In *The Hunger Games*, the Games serve as a controlling performance; the Capitol claims that the Games are intended to promote a spirit of nationalism, but in all actuality the Games promote a national sense of terror and unease. For the 75th Hunger Games anniversary, referred to as a Quarter Quell, President Snow devises a way in which he cannot punish Katniss and Peeta and also assert the power of the Capitol:

‘And now we honor our third Quarter Quell,’ says the president... Without hesitation, he reads, ‘On the seventy-fifth anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing

pool of victors.' ... District 12 only has three existing victors to choose from. Two male. One female... I am going back into the arena. (Collins 172-173)

President Snow's public broadcast allows him to once again assert his power over the districts by taking their heroes from them. This display is to convince the people that the Capitol cannot be defeated and his all-powerful. Public performances often help shape ideas of the people, question rules, sway popular opinion and "construct an aesthetics that sometimes functions as an epistemology" (Reinhelt 71). Ultimately, what controls the response of the audience, in any type of performance, is how the character executes their role: "a look, a glance, a gesture can mean everything and nothing" (MNDR). President Snow announces the Quarter Quell during a ceremony, after the national anthem has been played, among much pomp and circumstance. His performance controls the feelings of the audience of Panem and instills fear among tributes and citizens.

Performances often feature characters whom audiences love or love to hate. Richard Hatch will forever be remembered by popular culture as the villain in *Survivor* season 1, just as Rupert Boneham is thought of as the sweet, quirky, hero of his *Survivor* season. Richard is thought of as a villain because he was cut-throat and made decisions that solely served to benefit himself. Rupert quickly became loved by the nation because he displayed characteristics that made him appear genuine and caring, which people also often associate with being human. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss becomes a hero because she appears to be authentic. Although as a reader an audience can note the performance Katniss puts on in order to survive (pretending to be a star-crossed lover), it is much harder for the viewers of the Games to realize Katniss' deception. To them she

appears to be a young beautiful girl, who sacrificed herself for the sake of her sister, and is hopelessly in love with a boy that she might have to kill. Katniss appears to be beautiful, thanks to the heavy grooming provided her by her team of Capitol beauticians; is extremely athletic, having scored an eleven in her skills test; and exhibits humble behavior in her live televised interviews. While preparing for those interviews Katniss, is incredibly nervous and believes – mostly because of Haymitch's comments – that the public will not like her. Cinna, her chief stylist, calms her nerves by saying "Why don't you just be yourself" (Collins 121). But how exactly does one accomplish the feat of "being yourself" while involved in a performance?

It is not uncommon for television viewers to watch programs that feature everyday people overcoming extreme obstacles – often in order to win a large life changing monetary award, but are these people true representations of everyday people? Audiences often find themselves cheering for characters that appear to be genuine and authentically human – and flawed. Ned Vizzini, author of the essay "The Girl Who Was on Fire," argues that being authentically human is in fact the Aristotelian description of a hero. According to Vizzini, successful performers convince audience members that they too can accomplish amazing feats, and by placing ordinary people in extraordinary situations producers automatically endear their public, making them believe that they too could be a hero (87). This notion is popular in the United States because it is greatly similar to that of the American Dream – a dream that celebrates the rise and success of the everyday man. So what about Katniss makes her authentic? Vizzini suggests that:

Katniss Everdeen [...] is a post-American dreamer whose story pulls from eachstage of the past hundred years of media history [...] she is not

selected for the Hunger Games for any particular skill. Her family is struck by the hand of fate in the reaping and she does the best she can in response, selflessly taking the place of her younger sister, which is what we would like to think we would do. As an ordinary girl in extraordinary circumstances, her reluctance makes her authentic. (89-90).

Perhaps the independent spirit that commonly resides in many Americans has something to do with why Katniss has become a hero in the eyes of her audience (both in Panem and in today's world). Panem is a country that rose out of the ashes of North America, or the ruins of The United States – a place synonymous with freedom and independence. By placing her fictional country within the geographic location of the former continental U.S., Collins automatically instills a feeling of resistance within her story. The United States was born because of a revolution, one that over-threw a controlling government; common people grouped together in order to defeat a colonial government and form a more perfect union. Indeed, defeating a controlling force is typical of dystopian fiction, and the United States has been used as a setting many times in other dystopian works. However, in Collins's series, a *teenage girl* asserts her power and proves to be the capable victor of the Games, as well as the eventual liberator of Panem. Arguably, readers of *The Hunger Games* cheer for Katniss because she represents a hero that will return North America to the free and independent state it once was – yet she also is a symbol for female power, something that is not often championed in literature or real life.

The Hunger Games is perfectly suited for YAL because the nature of adolescence is that of rebellion and independence. Many young adults believe they are oppressed by the rules instilled upon them, either parental or institutional. In the beginning of the story

Katniss is burdened with the role of both mother and father, and must behave as an adult in order to provide for her family – leaving little time for teenage revelry. Although most adolescents cannot relate to Katniss's plight, they can admire her convictions and aspire to be as strong as her – making her an awe-inspiring heroine and role model.

Finally, Katniss appears most genuine to young adults because she struggles with her feelings. At times in the novel it seems as if she may be in love with Gale, but then he suddenly seems as if he is simply a brother figure to her. By appearing to be in love with Peeta, Katniss develops a love-sick character for the audience of Panem, but readers learn that her feelings for Peeta may not exist solely for her survival. Through Katniss's narrative, audiences are able to experience her up and down, and often-conflicting emotions in regards to Peeta and Gale – and the notion that love is not easy becomes quite clear. Many young adults experience these emotions, many times over, throughout adolescence. When Katniss performs these feelings in the arena, and in her narrative, it is possible to relate to a familiar emotional vulnerability.

Performance is a powerful notion. Performance is a notion that is significantly present in the media driven culture of today. Audiences witness characters performing on TV and also in novels, where themes of body image, control, identity, and rebellion can be seen. YAL novels encourage readers to become a part of the Epic Theatre in that they serve to inspire adolescents to critically analyze the world around them and change what needs to be changed. Literature is an art form and according to philosopher Herbert Marcuse, "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world" (33). Dystopian literature does just this. YA dystopian literature accomplishes this by featuring

performances by characters who appear to be human. In his social issues blog "Presentation Zen," Garr Reynolds suggests that "What makes some of the best speeches or presentations so memorable is not that they are perfect or slick, or overly polished, but that they are human. And to be human is to be imperfect" (Reynolds). YAL provides its readers with characters who make do in unjust situations, and perform resistance in such a way that they appear human and relatable – thus, YAL dystopias can inspire readers to do as Marcuse suggests "change the world."

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Chapter 3

Identity Performance in a Virtual World in Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*

Introduction

In the media driven, social network culture of today young adults often communicate with one another, and even know one another, solely through virtual identities that exist within imagined communities created in cyberspace. These identities are generated by people and function solely outside of physical reality; screen names and profile pictures have become virtual representations of corporeal personas. Technology provides people with the opportunity to create new identities for themselves, identities that allow them to interact and perform not only on the social network but also in emails, online gaming, and blogs. Adolescents of today have grown up in, and currently live in, a society that has been heavily impacted by virtual reality and technology. Performance theorist Elizabeth Bell suggests that technology, like performance, provides methods in which humans create, know, form opinions about, and critique the world (234). Arguably, young adults occasionally construct opinions about society because of what they learn through their Facebook newsfeeds and internet websites. Cyberspace also provides many adolescents with opportunities in which they can form new identities that more closely represent who they would like to be or who they feel they truly are. Therefore, as performance scholars Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasguta, suggest that "Cyberspace has become a performance space" (2).

Cory Doctorow's novel *Little Brother* includes many characters who assume virtual identities in order to represent facets of their personalities that they cannot safely perform in the physical world. Marcus Yallow, the 17-year old hero of *Little Brother*,

performs three identities throughout the novel: he becomes known to the audience first as Marcus, a typical teenage boy; as W1n5t0n, a hacker who frequently hacks the files of local truancy officers and school administrators; and M1k3y, the character who would lead a rebellion against the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Marcus is forced to create these secret and virtual identities to survive in the post-9/11 dystopic conditions of Doctorow's futuristic San Francisco setting.

The notion that modern day is in fact a dystopia has often been argued by scholars. Indeed many dystopian characteristics are present in current society: surveillance, advanced technology, and resistance. Dystopic elements such as these can promote a climate of unease, impacting how people conduct their everyday lives and construct their identities. Identity formation in an atmosphere of paranoia is not solely relegated to a post -9/11 climate, as youth have been coming of age in times of war and terror for centuries. However, modern technological advances have made it harder to determine who the enemy actually is. Should citizens be wary of foreign terrorist attacks, or a government who has the power to tap phones, hack personal web searches, and monitor bank accounts? It seems that in this modern age, the ability to pinpoint a single terrorist, or threat, is nearly impossible.

Threats, although not a reality but a possibility, loom on the horizon. According to Brian Massumi a threat is "...a form of futurity, yet has the capacity to fill the present without presenting itself...Threat is a future cause of a change in the present" (3). After 9/11, the United States government began investigating potential threats on a grander and more obvious scale than in years past. This dedication to threat prevention gave birth to the Patriot Act Public Law 107-56, an Act that was written to "...deter and punish

terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other purposes" ("Preserving Life and Liberty"). Perhaps most problematic about the Patriot Act is the use of the words "other purposes." This vague wording allows the government to investigate any person who appears threatening (monitoring bank accounts, tapping phone lines, hacking into web browser/email history). This invasion of privacy and blatant surveillance is to ensure the safety of the country – securing citizens against terrorist threats (outside and inside national borders). The Bush administration also created the color-coded threat level alert spectrum. Massumi further argues that the Bush Administration developed this spectrum in order to "...calibrate the public's anxiety" (1), increasing a national state of paranoia.

When George Bush's administration passed the U.S. Patriot Act the federal government was awarded the right to heavily monitor its own people, hence US citizens were *legally* under surveillance. Although the Patriot Act was initially written to protect U.S. citizens from terrorists, it instead casts these citizens in a guilty-before-proven-innocent light. A federal act such as this begs the question: how does this new form of increased monitoring affect teens in the process of identity formation – especially when it is adolescents who often resist surveillance and control?

In *Little Brother*, Marcus is coming of age in futuristic San Francisco. As stated earlier, Marcus creates multiple virtual and alternative reality identities for himself in order to navigate and survive post-terrorist attack San Francisco. Perhaps the most important factor in Marcus's ability to successfully construct identity in a time of terror is the fact that he has always been a part of imagined communities. Marcus's participation in Live Action Role Playing (LARP), online gaming, and interactive Alternative Reality Gaming (ARG),

enable him to participate in large social networks that afford him the feeling of belonging – even when he is performing a different persona. Although Marcus exists solely in fiction, many of the situations he experiences are relevant for youth in the world today. By using Marcus as a case study (exploring how he handles surveillance, trauma, and how he interacts with authority figures) it is possible to understand how many of today's youth are constructing identity in a post-9/11 climate. Marcus's creation of virtual identities is applicable to the youth of today, who are involved daily in the performance of personas in cyberspace. As such, many young adults are drawn to novels like *Little Brother* because they are written in their language – the language of technology. Studying popular YAL texts, like *Little Brother*, affords scholars opportunities in which they may gain a better understanding of their teenage subjects. Indeed, Marcus and the other characters in the novel are fictional and their circumstances are, arguably, far from normal. Due to the extreme circumstances of many YAL dystopian texts, characters, like Marcus, construct identities during times of heavy surveillance and monitoring. Teens living in this post-9/11 real world are forming identities in this same climate of high surveillance, and by studying YAL dystopian characters and novels, it is possible to gain a greater understanding as to how, and why, young adults are constructing their identities today. Thus, reading Doctorow's novel through the lens of performance theory allows for a rich study in identity construction and performance, which can be applied to real adolescents in order to form an understanding of how and why today's youth portray themselves physically and virtually.

Current Scholarly Readings

Little Brother is set in the not too distant future of San Francisco. The setting seems similar to that of San Francisco today, although there are more high-tech inventions in use

to monitor the public. Marcus Yallow and his friends, Darryl and Van, are average teenagers who are keenly interested in sneaking out of school and playing the alternative reality game (ARG) known as Harajuku Fun Madness (HFM). While on the quest to solve a clue in HFM, the trio are caught in an unexpected terrorist attack and mistaken as terrorists. The three are held prisoner by the DHS at a secret location, treated as the enemy, ruthlessly questioned about their supposed involvement in the attack, and eventually let go (with the exception of Darryl). Upon their release, the DHS warns Marcus that they will be watching him. Marcus, who has always fought the heavy surveillance his school administrators and local police enforced, becomes enraged that his rights have been so infringed upon and vows to fight for not only his right to privacy, but the rights of other U.S. citizens as well. Marcus begins using the Xnet (an Internet-connected gaming system) in order to spread his message of freedom, and through the creation of M1k3y he becomes a symbol of resistance and a reluctant hero who must stay on constant guard in order to resist capture and also to defeat the DHS.

Little Brother has not yet been written extensively about due to its fairly recent publication date, but scholarly articles do exist that discuss the dystopic elements of the text as well as how this text can be used to study adolescence in fields other than literature. In the article "*Feed vs. Little Brother: The Same Only Different*" Jennifer Miseck states that:

While both authors work from the premise that technology can be productive or destructive, Doctorow does not long for a time when we did not have technology. Instead, he considers how technology can corrupt, but how it can liberate, too, and it is technology-savvy teens who are the heroes

of the story... While Anderson longs for a time without technology, Doctorow endeavors to promote a critical eye toward our technology-centered society. (73)

Indeed, dystopian texts are often written in such a way that technology represents an evil, but Doctorow encourages his characters, and perhaps even his readers, to engage with technology in order to secure our rights and freedoms. Although Doctorow's text does feature technology being used negatively, to monitor and spy on citizens, in general technology is used positively in *Little Brother* as a way to defend freedom. It should not be surprising that media studies scholars are also intrigued by *Little Brother* and the effects high technology has on young adults.

Scholars interested in cultural and media studies are also concerned with the current culture that many adolescents are coming of age in. Annette Wannamaker and Ian Wojcik-Andrews argue that:

Little Brother...constructs adolescent characters and readers who, because they are clever and more media savvy than many of the adults in their world, are able to resist and subvert totalitarian governmental control by creating their own communications networks and media identities...the dichotomies suggested by *Little Brother's* views of a National Entertainment State give us useful terms and concepts for beginning a discussion regarding the relationships among young people, new media, and history and the way these three areas have converged to produce unsettling questions about children's culture. (415)

Indeed, youth coming of age today are doing so in a world very different than it was even ten years ago; cyberspace and the social network have completely changed how people live their lives. Frequently, people are only known to each other as Facebook friends or online gaming buddies, and engage with one another in imagined communities.

Imagined Communities

In a 1983 publication, Benedict Anderson coined the term “imagined communities” in his study on nation states. Anderson proposed that nations are in fact “... *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6, emphasis in original). Although Anderson's theory of imagined communities was directed towards the national level (and written during the cold war/Regan Era), the concept is still relevant today. Arguably, imagined communities continue to exist in this moment in various sizes and media forms. Due to the current cultural trend of sharing personal information with others (on a grand scale), imagined communities have expanded beyond Anderson's original argument. In fact, an imagined community can be found anywhere people interact: social networking (such as Facebook), online gaming groups, Sunday morning coffee groups, book clubs.

Anderson's theory, although not originally written to encompass the social network, remains relevant (perhaps more so) today, a fact that Arjun Appaduri proposes in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (which will be discussed in greater detail). Anderson argues “...all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are

imagined... [imagined communities exist] as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship" (6). Perhaps the only difference is that in regard to social networking, many people were at one time face-to-face friends and knew each other personally – whereas in today's culture people often only meet and interact through virtual discourse communities. Current scholarly argument suggests these types of communities are indeed far from positive, often persuading users to not only behave in ways they normally would not without social networks, (Fogg 24), but according to Anderson, negative and positive aspects are irrelevant to what imagined communities are – instead style is significant in imagined communities, as well as the content that these communities manage. Anderson stresses that style can be interpreted as how a community governs itself or simply the physicality of the community (for example: an internet community). In the case of Marcus Yallow, many of the imagined communities he belongs to are virtual – solely existing in cyberspace, and despite the physical limitations of these virtual communities, they are real to Marcus, and have played a very important role in the creation of his many identities.

In 2003, Arjun Appaduri wrote *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, in which he brought Anderson's theories of imagined communities into the 21st century – discussing the importance of media interconnection. Appaduri suggests that media and imagined communities are vital for identity formation, stating:

... they are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons... Because of the sheer multiplicity of the forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephones) and because of the rapid way which they move through daily life routines,

electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project. (3-4)

Therefore, according to Appaduri, imagined communities provide people with the opportunity to safely, and vicariously, experience identities that would have been previously unavailable to them. Currently virtual communities and social networks, despite their popularity, are often considered bad influences for youth culture. In the article "Media and Risky Behaviors" social networking is considered a highly influential factor in youth culture, and Appaduri attributes many negative behaviors to social media. The article states:

Media have a very powerful influence on health behavior. The leading causes of youth morbidity and mortality today are the outcomes of health risk behaviors that have been linked with social media exposure, including excessive caloric intake, physical inactivity, smoking, underage drinking, early sexual initiation, and violent behavior" (Escobar-Chaves and Anderson 168-169).

Despite this bleak forecast, virtual communities (such as Facebook) in fact serve a positive purpose in the process of identity formation, allowing adolescents the opportunity to become comfortable in varying degrees of roles and settings, as well as providing opportunities that enable youth to interact and engage with others. E. J. Westlake argues that:

... the predominantly Generation Y Facebook community uses Facebook to define the boundaries of normative behavior through unique performances of an online self, performances—which may look to older observers like

deviant exhibitionism on the one hand and a passive acceptance of intrusive surveillance on the other – are neither deviant nor passive. They are energetic engagements with the panoptic gaze: as people offer themselves up for surveillance, they establish and reinforce social norms, but also resist being fixed as rigid, unchanging subjects" (23).

Thus, the virtual atmosphere of social networking provides youth with the perfect stage for important developmental role playing. Although the characters in Doctorow's YAL novel are indeed fictional they frequently create cyber identities that are considered deviant by some, the DHS, and exhibitionist to others. *Little Brother* appears to counter claims made by scholars who argue that the social network, and cyber space itself, is harmful for youth – instead the book champions the use of these technologies to interact with others and to create identities that allow youth to realize all aspects of their characters.

Marcus started experimenting with role playing at an early age in order to perform different facets of his identity. Before Marcus became interested in ARGs he spent time as a Live Action Role Player (LARPer). Despite the nerd label that Marcus believes coincides with LARPing, he grudgingly admits his past involvement stating, "I have a dark secret: I used to be a LARPer...and it's just about what it sounds like: running around in costume, talking in a funny accent, pretending to be a superspy or vampire or a medieval knight. It's like Capture the Flag in monster-drag, with a bit of Drama Club thrown in..." (Doctorow 36-37). After a bad incident at a LARPer event, involving "Normal people" Marcus quits LARPing, and instead begins virtual gaming on his Xbox, eventually transitioning to Alternative Reality Gaming (ARG) – echoing Appaduri's suggestion that the style of the imagined community, especially in the case of Marcus, is what matters.

Marcus's past role performances allowed him to interact with many different people and groups, which has afforded him the ability to transition successfully from the many roles he performs (son, friend, hacker, gamer, freedom fighter), as well as develop a strong sense of identity.

Adolescent Psychologist, David Elkind, believes that the more opportunities youth have to intermingle within societal groups (imagined or not) the better a sense of self is developed. A strong sense of self enables youth to encounter and manage stressful situations in a successful manner. Elkind suggests that "An integrated sense of self and identity... means bringing together into a working whole a set of attitudes, values, and habits that can serve both self and society. The attainment of a healthy sense of identity...gives young people a perspective, a way of looking at themselves and others, which enables them to manage the majority of stress situations" (196). Many youth of today, like Marcus, are involved with LARPing, ARGing, and gaming, which provide them opportunities to interact with different societal groups and gain perspective in regards to current culture. Elkind's theory, that youth who have been active in many different community groups develop stronger identities, is frequently proven in YAL – a genre that, arguably, encourages its readers to form multiple roles in order to become stronger individuals.

Applying Performance Theory and Psychology

In terms of performance theory, cyberspace can be considered a stage; indeed, it provides a setting in which people perform characters (identities). Bell claims that online settings provide rich spaces for sociality and allow people to perform identities that can be considered slippery "morphing the 'stable' categories of gender, age, race, sexuality,

and even species and humanness" (257). Although, Marcus never performs any non-human characters (aside from his LARP vampire character) in the text, he is able to use the internet as a stage for his character M1k3y. In order to meet with reporters, and possible DHS spies, Marcus sets up a chat in the virtual gaming world of Clockwork Plunder. This space allows Marcus to safely assume the identity of M13ky and to also broadcast his message:

My name is M1k3y and I'm not the leader of anything... All around you are Xnetters who have as much to say about why we're here as I do. I use the Xnet because I believe in freedom and the Constitution of the United States of America. I use Xnet because the DHS has turned my city into a police-state where we're all suspected terrorists. I use the Xnet because I think you can't defend freedom by tearing up the Bill of Rights... The DHS does not govern with my consent.

(Doctorow 235)

Marcus's last words, and most of his message, are considered rebellious and treasonous by the DHS. Thus, the virtual world acts as a safe place in which Marcus can actively engage in public dissention of the DHS. Clockwork Plunder does not exist in physical reality, but Lance Gharavi, performance theorist, argues that "All video games, by being interactive, also have at least some degree of liveness to them" (355). Therefore, according to Gharavi, the interactions that take place in Clockwork Plunder are still considered live and real – that cause real life and real time consequences. Performance theorist Jon McKenzie suggests that interaction in a cyber world is a "hybrid performance in which human users perform 'real interactions' within continuous 'real time' and 'real

space' (3-D) computer environments" (85). As such, the roles that Marcus plays while online, W1n5t0n and M1k3y, are indeed real and also adaptable. Because many online games allow for performers to chat with one another, or leave one another messages, feedback is readily available which allows a performer to adjust his performance accordingly. Kurt Lindemann argues that cyberspace allows for people to "...utilize the computer screen as a new space for the narration of the 'desired self' (359). Thus, cyberspace operates very similarly to Psychologist George Kelly's fixed role therapy.

George Kelly, known for research involving role play, believed people perceive and organize their world of experiences by formulating hypotheses about the environment and testing them against the reality of daily life. Although Kelly may have never envisioned virtual reality and cyberspace when creating his theories, his ideas are particularly applicable in the computer-driven world of today. Through social media and gaming, today's youth are able to formulate a hypothesis regarding an experience (real or not) and then test this hypothesis and learned knowledge to everyday life.

According to Kelly, people observe the events of their lives and interpret them in their own way. This special view, the unique pattern created by each individual, is what Kelly called the construct system. A construct is a person's unique way of looking at life, an intellectual hypothesis devised to explain or interpret events (Schultz and Schultz 347). Over the course of a person's life he/she develops many constructs, one for almost every person and situation encountered. People expand and alter, and discard these constructs periodically as situations change. According to Kelly's theory of constructive alternativism, constructs are not fixed but instead are extremely adaptable, allowing people to continually revise them (Schultz and Schultz 348). Related to this notion, Kelly

promoted a form of psychotherapy – fixed role therapy – which allowed clients to formulate new identities and discard old ones; he would ask a client to write a self-characterization sketch of himself as the lead character in a play. Kelly developed fixed role therapy by observing a friend who was cast in a college dramatic production; this person became more and more like the character in the play offstage. Through this experience, Kelly was able to understand and hone the intent of fixed role therapy: first to play a role and then come to live it (Schultz and Schultz 347-349).

Theories and research by Anderson, Appaduri, and Kelly make it possible to understand how the character of Marcus is able to successfully develop a strong sense of self and navigate a traumatic experience in *Little Brother*. As mentioned earlier, today's youth are constructing identities and trying on roles in a world that has been greatly impacted by the terrorist attack on 9/11. The current cultural climate of monitoring and surveillance can be compared to many YAL dystopian texts that often feature societies impacted by controlling forces that strictly monitor their citizens. Although performative identity construction has been present in YAL dystopias for decades, this textual feature is more obvious in novels published post-9/11. This could indicate that real world performative identity practices are on the rise in the post-9/11 era, perhaps as a way of coping with the national tragedy. By using Doctorow's main character as a case study, it becomes possible to comprehend how many young adults today are developing identities in an atmosphere of war, economic hard times, and terrorism. The connection of dystopic conditions with our current cultural climate, a world impacted by terrorism that now features strict governmental surveillance and monitoring (as many dystopian texts do), is significant because many fictional characters are taking on roles and forming

identities in settings that align with roles of real adolescents. As such, YAL provides scholars the opportunity to better study young adults by using the literature youth read to assist in understanding adolescent identity construction. It has been argued that the young adults of today are growing up faster than previous generations (physically and mentally), and doing so in a completely different atmosphere than in years past – an atmosphere that has been heavily impacted by new and advanced technology and the heightened sense of paranoia.

Performance, Paranoia, and Identity Formation

The feeling of paranoia, basically the sensation of being watched, can be compared to what young adults often feel in regard to their own parents and their house rules. Indeed growing up with parental rules can be difficult – youth often strike out and rebel against the desires of their parents, even though restrictions are meant to keep them safe. Much of the same sentiment can be applied to how citizens feel about their government. Governments are also established to ensure the safety and prosperity of their citizens, yet people often grumble about the amount of governmental control in their lives. It is common for many adolescents to rebel, because parents often establish rules that are either unfair, or simply unreasonable (much like governments). Adolescent psychologist David Elkind states:

When I talk to parents about being adults to their children and about setting rules and limits with love and caring, some parents respond by saying, 'It doesn't do any good, they do what they want anyway.' On further exploration, I often find that these parents have set rules that they could not enforce and which their teenagers broke with impunity. (244)

A similar sentiment can be applied to the relationship between Government and United States Citizens. Marcus, pre-terrorist attack, frequently rebels against school administration rules, simply because to him they appear unnecessary, and are also unenforceable due to Marcus's hacker status. Lillian and Drew, Marcus's parents appear, to not create nor enforce any rules for Marcus until after the terrorist attack – and Marcus believes these rules are unacceptable and refuses to follow them as well. Sharing a characteristic of many Young Adult novels, Doctorow's *Little Brother* features relatively absent parents. Though Marcus's parents do indeed attempt to appear somewhat strict and controlling, post terrorist attack, the life of Marcus appears to be virtually rule free. Doctorow instead provides Marcus with a much larger and terrifying enemy to grapple with, the Department of Homeland Security – a real life authoritative and controlling force known for its use of high tech surveillance (that the youth of today do not often think of in a negative light). In a 2008 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Doctorow said "The authoritarian agenda has been expanding. I tell kids that if you think you're going to graduate into being free adults when you finish school, you'd better think again. But I tell adults that what you're allowing to happen to your kids today is a test laboratory for what's being done to you" (Johnson n.pag). Indeed, Doctorow seeks to educate his readers, of all ages, about the amount of surveillance that exists in everyday life. As such, his decision to use the DHS as the dystopic controlling force in his novel serves as a lesson for both adolescents and parents.

School can be considered a controlling force that is present in the lives of adolescents, and has been described as a dystopia. In the article "Living in a Real Teenage Dystopia: The Classroom," Isamu Fukui states, "We need not speculate what a

dystopia might look like in the here and now. All we have to do is go back to school" (n.pag.). Fukui's own high school was one in which a dictator-like principle monitored students through video surveillance, mind-boggling security measures, and restrictions on entering and exiting the school – very similar to Principle Benson in Doctorow's novel. Fukui suggests that high school stifled his independent spirit, rather than encouraged it – and fears that youth today will simply fall in line with preposterous rules, rather than resist and question them – incapable of the ability to stand up for their rights. Marcus's high school is equipped with high tech surveillance devices that appear over-the-top and unneeded, and these cameras do much more than just film the hallways to check for intruders:

These [gait-recognition cameras] had been installed only a year before, and I loved them for their sheer idiocy. Beforehand, we'd had face-recognition cameras covering nearly every public space in school, but a court ruled that was unconstitutional. So Benson and a lot of other paranoid school administrators had spent our textbook dollars on these idiot cameras that were supposed to be able to tell one person's walk from another. (Doctorow 14)

Students in *Little Brother* quickly learned how to trick the cameras, often by walking in a different manner, because the idea of these gait recognition is preposterous to students. Many adolescents subvert seemingly ridiculous high school rules by performing identities that allow them to navigate school administrator's laws and also interact with differing social groups. Although Marcus's situation is unique, he performs his virtual identities for many of the same reasons that real life teens do – in the rule-free performative setting

known as cyber space. Performance of multiple roles, in cyberspace, allow Marcus to assume control in his life in a time where he believes he has no control over his environment and setting.

The first identity Marcus creates is known as w1n5t0n, which he uses to thwart his school officials:

Of course it [w1n5t0n] was my handle, and had been for years. It was the identity I used when I was posting on message-boards where I was making my contributions to the field of applied security research. You know, like sneaking out of school and disabling the minder-tracer on my phone. But he [Marcus's principle] didn't know that was my handle. Only a small number of people did, and I trusted them to all the end of the earth... No one at school ever called me w1n5t0n or even Winston. Not even my pals.

(Doctorow 11)

Marcus could not act as w1n5t0n at school because it was unsafe to do so and therefore he performed this identity while in the safe setting of the internet. Marcus's second identity, M1k3y is created after his detainment with the DHS. He fears that this former handle has been compromised and creates M1k3y to remain as anonymous as possible while attempting to unite people over the Xnet in order to resist the DHS. Marcus says "I wasn't using w1n5ton anymore. If Benson could figure it out, anyone could. My new handle, come up with on the spur of the moment, was M1k3y, and I got a *lot* of email from people who heard in chat rooms and message boards that I could help them troubleshoot their Xnet configurations and connections" (Doctorow 124). Over time M1k3y becomes known as a hero, an educated and inspirational freedom fighter.

Although Marcus is reluctant with being thought of as a hero, when he is performing the identity of M1k3y, he is a skilled and passionate leader, quite different from the snarky 17-year old known as Marcus.

Although, as stated earlier, Doctorow's novel is fictional, it appears realistic due to the real world nature of the predicaments Marcus finds himself in – which result in overbearing and seemingly senseless restrictions as well as governmental-approved surveillance, which in turn spark virtual performances that are performative and instrumental in Marcus' identity formation.

Young Adult Literature is often referred to as coming of age literature, literature that helps young people form a sense of identity. However, what Young Adult Literature appears to do, as evident in *Little Brother*, is endorse the performance of multiple roles in order to allow characters to express personal power and control of their environments. Marcus plays many roles in Doctorow's novel: a student, a captive, a hacker, a freedom fighter, a LARPer, an ARGer – all of these roles make Marcus who he is, and they also enable him to successfully survive a traumatic experience.

In this current cultural climate of heightened paranoia, young people are constructing their identities together – via Facebook and other imagined communities. And although this idea can at first appear frightening, according to the research of many theorists and scholars, it should not be. The more chances that the youth of today have to interact with different social groups (virtually or physically), the more opportunities they have to develop identities that assist in the successful navigation of difficult situations. Applying performance theory to YAL dystopian texts is especially important in this current era, which has been referred to as aggressively performative. It can be argued

that many young adults have begun performing new roles by creating online identities in response to the current climate of war and terror. Dystopian YAL endorses this current performative trend, and has for decades. *Little Brother* features characters performing identities in a virtual environment, free from many of the societal rules and regulations that are present in dystopian fiction and present day, which provides real young adults with examples as to how they can also safely determine what roles best suit them. By using Marcus as a case study, it is possible to understand how performance in YAL empowers fictional characters as well as real people. The performative nature of dystopian YAL positively impacts young adults as well as the people who study them., and the performative notions it endorses, impacts not only young adults

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Epilogue

In the article "Crossover Novels," author Sophie Masson discusses the crossover literature phenomenon in depth arguing that "crossover doesn't mean adult novels crossing over to young people's reading: that's taken as a desirable given, whether those are of classic or modern authors, literary or popular writers. No, what is meant here is the traffic going the other way: children's and young adult novels being read by adults" (n.pag.). Certainly parents read books designated for children and teens to ensure that the literature is appropriate and also to enable educational discussion within the family. However, the number of adult readers reading YAL has risen significantly in the past seven years. According to a September 2012 Bowker Market Research Study:

Fully 55% of buyers of works that publishers designate for kids aged 12 to 17 are 18 or older, with the largest segment aged 30 to 44. Accounting for 28 percent of sales, these adults aren't just purchasing for others – when asked about the intended recipient, they report that 78 percent of the time they are purchasing books for their own reading. (n.pag.)

Susan Carpenter, writer for the Los Angeles Times says: "It used to be that the only adults who read young adult literature were those who had a vested interest – teachers or librarians or parents who either needed or wanted to keep an eye on developing readers' tastes. But increasingly, adults are reading YA books with no ulterior motives" (n.pag.).

The crossover trend has been suggested to have started with J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, which is actually considered Children's Literature. However, books like *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* have also been credited with sparking adult readers' interest

in YAL. In the YAL blog, *The Hub*, Jennifer Rummel suggests that the crossover trend could be because an increasing amount of popular adult writers are now venturing into writing YAL:

James Patterson, John Grisham, Carl Hiaasen, Jodi Picoult, Harlan Coben, Elizabeth George, and Adriana Trigiani are a handful of the many adult authors making the transition to young adult. These bestselling authors already have a large following, many of whom are willing to try their teen novels. (n.pag.)

Popular writers do indeed encourage readership, however this is not the sole reason for adults reading YAL. Theories exist that span from the idea that the crossover trend is a clever marketing strategy to the thought that adults indulge in escapism while reading YAL, which usually offers exciting storylines and complex characters. This project dealt with the performative aspect of YAL, arguing that YAL features characters in the process of identity formation that resist singular roles and embrace multiple identities. While the focus of my study is primarily adolescent readers, the fact remains that the performative nature of YAL is desirable to adult readers as well. Although the scope of this project prevents me from formally investigating this phenomenon, this brief epilogue will provide some preliminary thoughts about performance and its connection to adult readers, demonstrating how this is a topic worthy of future scholarly study.

Performative Culture of Today

The current high tech cultural climate of today may explain why both young adults and adults are drawn to the performative nature of YAL at the current moment. Performance theorist Elizabeth Bell argues that people in the present day currently live in

highly theatrical times that have been made so because of the many technologies interacted with on a daily basis (236). In 1964, media theorist Marshall McLuhan argued that "technologies are extensions of man, tools that extend human bodies and human capacities" (158). In 1997 Patrick Maynard updated and built upon McLuhan's theories and suggested that "technologies (including crafts) are extenders of our powers to do things... most fine arts are, broadly speaking, kinds of technologies: amplifiers of our powers to manifest (and thereby develop) our conceptions and values" (98). As such, the internet-centered culture of today has allowed many people, of various generations, the ability to extend themselves online – to engage with the notion of identity performance and creation, impacting how current society interacts with one another. *The Giver*, *The Hunger Games*, *Little Brother*, and *The House of the Scorpion* are examples of YAL novels within this genre that feature characters in the process of identity formation and identity performance. Each of these texts showcases a character who creates an identity different from the one assigned to him/her, an identity that better serves the character and allows him/her to free themselves from controlling forces or problematic settings.

Cyberspace has been referred to as a performance space by many theorists. Arguably, since its creation, Cyberspace has allowed people to create online profiles that reflect how they are viewed by the public; the internet allows real people to liberate themselves from their assigned roles and identities. As such, many adult readers can relate to the performative nature of YAL because it is present in their everyday lives.

Although young adults have more opportunities to form and create new identities in their real lives than adults, adults are afforded this opportunity through their interaction with the social network – which allows for the editing of profile pictures enabling the

public to see a created identity. Sherry Turkle, author of "The Flight From Conversation" argues that "We want to customize our lives. We want to move in and out of where we are because the thing we value most is control over where we focus our attention" (n.pag.). Adult readers are attracted to YAL because the characters in these texts are able to "customize" their own lives in similar, albeit more serious, ways. In real life adults are not afforded this opportunity; however the internet enables adults with the chance to customize and perfect an identity – thus gain control over the type of person they seek to be.

Control is a prominent feature in dystopian YAL; characters in these texts often fight governing forces in order to create desired identities. YAL characters such as Jonas, Matt, Katniss, and Marcus all seek control in their own lives, searching to live in a setting where they can not only be themselves but also are allowed to focus their attentions on their own desires. Although adulthood is often thought of as a time where people assume control, this is sometimes not the case. Governmental and societal rules often dictate the choices many adults make – affecting control in their own lives. Thus, it can be refreshing for adults to read about characters who appear to have power, and control, in their own lives. Typically, but not always, YAL dystopias end with the main character defeating the dystopia: Katniss defeats the Capitol, Matt returns to his home as rightful heir to the Alacran estate, Marcus brings down the corrupt DHS, and Jonas escapes his controlling community to find refuge and acceptance Elsewhere. Often in real life, adults do not "win" or defeat their controlling force. Thus, reading about characters that escape role assignment, develop new roles, and defeat the dystopia, can provide adults with a sense of hope that this too can be possible in their own lives.

In the current 24/7 instant gratification culture, which has been greatly influenced by the social-networking movement, control can be fleeting. The world appears to move so quickly that, arguably, some adults believe as if they cannot control, keep up with, or manage their own lives during this time of "nowness." A November 2012 Blackmores research survey indicated that adults often feel as if they have lost control of their lives and reported that: "68 per cent of adults think life is getting busier, 61 per cent say they can't get everything done in a day, and 95 per cent say they have woken up tired in the last two weeks" (n.pag). Many adults are left feeling as if they have no control of their busy lives. The term "newness" and the notion of control are reflected in the literature being produced at this moment. Katniss Everdeen, heroine of *The Hunger Games*, takes control of not only her own life, but the lives of others in Collins's deadly Arena. Through her story, told in first person point of view, present tense, it is possible to experience the "it's all happening now" phenomenon that occurs in a great deal of YAL, often referred to as the "nowness" of adolescence, and to experience a character successfully navigate constantly changing circumstances. "Nowness" is indeed a feature of the internet, as people are afforded immediate results to friend requests, status updates, online shopping, and emails. Bell suggests that:

If performers and audience members share the same space, they are also sharing time. Furthermore, that time spent together is experienced in the present tense. 'We are here together, right now.' The action and the audience's experience of the action, both on the stage and in the seats, is *live*." (242, emphasis in original)

Indeed, social networking applications such as Facebook and Instagram do provide people with the opportunity to share the same place with their intended audiences, and the frequent updating of status updates allows people to receive instant feedback in regard to the identity they are portraying online.

The current crossover trend could be attributed to adults seeking to reminisce about a time in their lives when their roles were not so fixed, a time where they were not locked into jobs, families, parenting duties, and mortgage payments – a time when it was simpler to create new identities. Another explanation is that adults today, like many young adults, live very performative lives due to their interaction with social networks, online gaming, and email. Through the use of cyberspace technologies, adults are given the daily opportunity to recreate themselves in an image of their own making, to edit their profiles (in order for others to see them how they want to be seen), and to interact in chosen settings. Cyberspace is one of the few spaces that adults are allowed the freedom (from their obligations and restrictions) to take part in performative play, which is no longer a possibility in their more fixed lives. Teens, like the adolescent characters in *The Giver*, *The Hunger Games*, *The House of the Scorpion*, and *Little Brother*, do indeed perform identities via the internet but they also do so in their real lives – as they attempt to construct their identities and roles. Adults are not afforded that opportunity in real life, and cyberspace grants them chances to re-create themselves in socially allowable ways. Thus, adults could be drawn to young adult texts because they can relate to the idea of identity performance in general (as they are part of a culture that thrusts such notions upon them via social networking).

Arguably, adults enjoy reading about characters that perform identity freely because it is a cathartic process. Although I cannot currently propose any definite arguments in regard to the crossover trend, it is important to note that identity performance and role-playing may be a strong reason for the phenomenon. As such, I believe that adults have become accustomed to role performance through Cyberspace and seek out texts that offer the same feeling of excitement and freedom (in regard to identity) that the social network provides.

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