

***How to Win Friends and
Influence People***

You can't teach people to be selfless if they don't want to be.

Emily Francis, Occupy Los Angeles protester

Just before noon, a group of officers with the L.A. Department of General Services walked through the camp to pass out fliers noting that regulations call for the area around City Hall to be closed from 10:30 p.m. to 5 a.m. daily. To most, it was a reminder that the [Occupy Los Angeles] camp's days were almost over. Some booed the officers.

"Who are you guys? Who did you make an oath to?" asked one protester wearing a sleeveless shirt and a camouflage cap. "You look like a paid thug, like a cartel."

Other campers chose a more playful tone with the officers. One 34-year-old woman with a gray beret, who identified herself only as Waffles, asked a tall burly officer a question.

"I'm homeless. Can I occupy your house? I cook," she said.

"I don't think my wife will work with that," the officer replied, to laughter.

She then turned to another officer and said, "You guys realize you're not part of the 1%," referring to the wealthiest Americans.

"You guys know that too, right?" the officer responded, to sympathetic smiles.

Hector Becerra, Los Angeles Times, November 26th, 2011

1. Compared to What You Do to Me, I Am Just a Raging Sea

I started crossing my 7s and looping my 2s in 7th grade. I liked a girl in my math class who wrote the numbers that way on her homework, and I wanted to impress her; I thought she might notice me if I used her style when the teacher picked me to solve a problem on the whiteboard. A couple of days later, our teacher asked for whiteboard volunteers, and I seized my chance. I drew a conspicuously overlarge 7, crossed it with a flourish, looked over my shoulder at my classmates...and saw the girl looking at her paper, brow furrowed, lost in thought, certainly not noticing my misguided imitation. *Drat.*

But I am nothing if not persistent, and I found myself downtown with her on a crisp fall afternoon two years later, enjoying our only date (the first of my short lifetime!) We ate ice cream and people-watched, talking too quickly, our teeth occasionally chattering from cold and shared nervousness. Afterwards, we ended up on our old elementary school's swing-set, sharing the stories each had missed from the other's childhood as we rose and fell, leaping off at the highest points and laughing as we landed in the woodchips. When the grey autumn skies opened up, I walked her home in the rain, playing the perfect gentleman at age 14.

Sixteen years have passed since then. We each left our small town and struck out for the bright lights – she to the City by the Bay, I to the City of Angels. What evolved into a tight-knit friendship in high school unwound into something more relaxed over time and distance. We like each others' posts when they appear on our feeds; we went to a Giants game when I spent a day up north a couple of years ago. She's in my life, peripherally, which is probably the best thing that seventh-grade version of me could've hoped would come to pass.

And I still cross my 7s and loop my 2s.

Tom Hansen of Margate, New Jersey, grew up believing that he'd never truly be happy until the day he met "the one." This belief stemmed from early exposure to sad British pop music and a total misreading of the movie The Graduate.

Dante doesn't expect to find Francesca when he reaches the Second Circle. She had always treated him kindly; he can't understand how she could have ended up there, or why she and another soul (Paolo) seem to be punished in tandem. Francesca admits to him that she'd consummated an affair with Paolo, and that she's now paying the price for betraying her vows and her morals. But she then says something I've always found odd. She insists to Dante that the book she read with Paolo – the story of Lancelot and Guinevere's own torrid affair – changed her somehow, that she never would have cheated had she never read the book.

Odder still: Dante buys her line of reasoning! He reasons that he and other artists tend to write about flawed characters, illicit behaviors, and immoral activities in ways that glorify them. Audiences who consume such glorifications uncritically (as we consume most art) will find their own moral strength weakened. They'll accept what they once rejected because they'll now be familiar with it, and their own morals and behaviors will shift if they are exposed to such works. Conversely, if artists stopped giving readers unrealistic expectations about romance, perhaps people would be happier in their relationships and less tempted to sin.

Therefore, Dante muses, Francesca's sin is not merely her own; the authors of the book, the artists and the creators, had a duty to provide her with morally upstanding content, and chose artistic license over that duty. They're at least partially at fault, because if she'd never read the book, she would've stuck with her morals.

Do you buy it?

It's these cards, and the movies, and the pop songs – they're to blame for all the lies and the heartache, everything. We're responsible. I'm responsible.

I think we do a bad thing here.

We form strong associations with things, absorb habits and quirks as we move through life, shape our preferences based on our experiences. But is *art* able to affect someone in ways that simple life experience can't?

Art can certainly affect someone. (Otherwise, what would be the point?) I changed my writing style after reading Tomas Rivera's ...*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* (which is fantastic; for those of you studying SFHP for the full year, it's the last book I teach for that course). I cried three times the first time I watched *Up*, because I saw it with someone who I loved who strongly reminded me of Ellie; couple that with Carl's uncanny resemblance to an elderly version of me, and you'd understand why watching that opening montage still feels like watching myself enduring the exact kind of loss that terrifies me most.

However, I don't think that Francesca is pointing out that the story in question affected her emotionally. Instead, she's advancing another point entirely: that the book determined her decision, that it's the reason she cheated. The unspoken follow-up to that point, as mentioned earlier, is that she would have remained sin-free had she never read that book.

But can art really do that – turn someone who's typically virtuous into a sinner? Can a film make you behave violently, a song make you speak in a misogynistic way, or a painting make you cheat? In other words, can art make you do something that, given the same circumstances and opportunities for action, *you wouldn't have done otherwise*?

This is actually a tougher question than it seems. Firstly, you have to be able to discuss and define what we mean by art. (Is a political speech art? Is a video game?) Secondly, you have to talk about why people do what they do, and discuss how we should determine responsibility for actions. Finally, you have to ask yourself whether people can be altered against their will; if so, is it our responsibility to protect audiences from art? Is it the creator's responsibility? The state's?

It's worth noting that, as far as art is concerned, our Constitution defends most (if not all) forms of expression. Sometimes people abuse this privilege, hiding behind the shield of "But it's art!" when they face criticism. That privilege of expression comes with a silent responsibility – to use it wisely – but that responsibility is sometimes disregarded. Sometimes, it's good to disregard it; Dante's *Inferno* wouldn't have existed if, say, Pope Boniface VIII had final editorial control. Sometimes, it's bad to disregard it; people spread damaging misinformation, and not always in ways that are prosecutable under libel and slander laws.

At any rate, freedom of expression or no, there seem to be certain things that you shouldn't expect to access freely. (I don't think anyone expects to see, say, sexually explicit material at 10am on Saturday when they turn on Cartoon Network.) Instead, we've established certain conventions when it comes to the consumption of art – we have rating systems for everything from movies to games, and some people or group even go so far as to condemn and/or censor certain expressions. A movie on television, for example, is often edited for general consumption: violence is tamped down, obscenities silenced, and love scenes cut altogether.

Why do we do this? Why isn't explicit material allowed at 10am on Cartoon Network? The easy response would be, "Well, that sort of thing wouldn't be appropriate for the likely members of that particular

audience.” I agree. But how often do we ask ourselves *why* that’s true? I’ve joked in class that we wouldn’t show *Saw* to a bunch of three-year-olds. Well, why wouldn’t we? Why shouldn’t we? (For the record: I am decidedly not a fan of the *Saw* series, and do not believe we should show it to three-year-olds.)

Behind every attempt to protect a vulnerable audience – children, religious believers, etc. – lie two competing impulses. One is the simple desire to avoid offending someone, although it must be pointed out that plenty of incredible works, including both *The Divine Comedy* and *Macbeth*, have been nearly or successfully banned in the name of avoiding offense. The other is the fear that, as Francesca argues, people will behave in ways they wouldn’t otherwise have behaved had they never encountered that art. (What if a good child who doesn’t swear suddenly becomes a foul-mouthed brat after listening to a loud, abrasive punk album?) At that point, it’s not a matter of whether one should avoid offense; it’s about being afraid of damaging someone, possibly irreparably.

Robert J. Sternberg advanced a variation of this hypothesis in *Happily Ever After*, published centuries after Dante’s death – namely, that your attitude towards love, your expectations, your desires, are all shaped by the stories you encounter and internalize. And it’s not simply *love*, of course, that’s influenced by narratives and art. How one thinks about death, about God, about political matters, gender dynamics, cultural identities, what you buy and what you keep – so much of it is supposedly shaped by these things, to the point that we can be changed against our wills, or without our knowing, into people who think differently, act differently, want differently. (Judging from the Good Samaritan example in *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell would seem to agree.)

And we have to ask ourselves once more whether this is true: whether you are risking yourself when you examine a book, watch a movie, or listen to a song – whether you are recklessly risking the very nature of your immortal soul every time you uncritically consume art.

For if you aren’t...why do we keep censoring art, censoring those who speak out, and issuing ratings that restrict access to certain kinds of material? If art can’t mold you into a shape its creators prefer, why do very smart people spend billions upon billions of dollars designing advertisements whose sole aim is to change what we like and what we believe – oftentimes, to reverse our preferences and beliefs – until we’ll buy whatever’s on sale: a clothing line, an ideological bent, a preferred candidate? Why do we, as a collective whole, as a society, forbid the dissemination and spread of works we find hazardous *if they do not pose a hazard?*

If art can’t do what Francesca and Dante claim it can – if words on a page cannot distort you – then what are we so afraid of?

I need some consistency.

I know.

I need to know that you’re not gonna wake up in the morning and feel differently.

And I can’t give you that. Nobody can.

2. You Don't Have to Go Home, But You Can't Stay Here

November 27th, 2011

I'm finishing my latest version of this blog at 11:51pm on a Sunday night. In ten minutes, Occupy Los Angeles' deadline for clearing its camp will have passed.

As a writer, or at least someone who appreciates the craft, I pay a great deal of attention to the method someone uses to make a point. If, as we've discussed before, our plots have already been introduced, hashed, and rehashed, our storytelling methods become critically important. This is why I'd rather listen to a quiet, low-key story told in compelling fashion than a naturally exciting story told terribly.

I've been watching the Occupy movement with a certain degree of trepidation because – and this has nothing to do with my political ideology, or with theirs – I cannot understand the methods its followers are employing in their pursuit of their cause.

If I may be incredibly simplistic here: successful movements (I'm defining "success" here as "having tangibly altered some aspect of American society") seem to follow certain patterns. Define an issue to address or a problem to solve; take specific steps to solve it in ways that are either economically appealing or economically survivable; enlist allies with varying degrees of social and political influence; and so on. Think of something like the solar-energy movement, which has fought – and is still fighting – an uphill battle for years. Supporters have crafted ballot measures in friendly states (and worked to get them passed by sometimes skeptical voters), lobbied lawmakers, donated funds to people working on solar-related technologies, and served as early adopters and advocates for the tech. And over the years, innovation made the technology cheaper, advocacy education made it seem more sensible, and businesses provided opportunities for people to continue investing in/adopting the technology. It's a stretch to say the solar-energy movement has succeeded, but it's not one to say they have experienced some success: some of the specific things they set out to achieve have, in fact, been achieved.

The point of movements like these seems simple: make a change that improves **(insert your pet cause here)**. But it's easy to see that the process of attaining lasting change is, in fact, incredibly complex. Success requires compromise, flexibility, wisdom, patience, discipline, communication, prioritization, resources, and enthusiasm. In that sense, a successful movement has to employ the same principles that an effective partner group needs to use to complete a cooperative project. And while an overzealous student can sometimes hijack/rescue a failing group from itself, no such analogue exists for political causes: a movement which lacks any single criterion from the group listed above will be destroyed in the long run.

This is why I can't understand what the Occupy movement hopes to accomplish. Anyone reading coverage of the movement now knows about the 99%/1% split the protesters bemoan; if it set out to raise awareness of a social ill within America's larger collective consciousness, it's done it. But the movement hasn't developed a larger, unified message worth sharing; now that it's raised its original point, what is it still doing in the parks?

The movement's been fueled largely by emotion and passion to this point; many people who have joined talk about "feeling" like they needed to be part of it. But the participants seem to be paying precious little attention to expanding the movement's methods for ensuring change – what they are, what they seek to achieve, whether they will succeed in altering people's behavior, etc. Unfortunately for them, they have to expand; one can only repeat the same words in the same way for so long before they lose their impact.

Thus we reach a crossroads: Occupy has been told it needs to go elsewhere, but there doesn't seem to be a plan to adapt to changing circumstances, and no one really seems to know where it should go from here in order to be successful.

So some of them will disperse. Some of them will dig in, cause problems, and be arrested. And some, like Waffles, will have no other place to go.

From a “macro” perspective, I’m focusing on the protesters’ methods and shaking my head. If my students tried taking the same approach to a project I assigned, I would give the assignment a failing grade. Where’s the plan? How will the protesters know when they’re “done”? Are their goals outlined anywhere, and if so, are they achievable or feasible?

Just about all of the coverage of the Occupy movement offers up directions for its future. Incorporate. Lobby. Move inside. Rent office space. Go into politics. Disband. Seemingly none advocates staying the course, for while the protests, like the art we discussed above, may be shielded by the Constitution, that doesn’t mean they’re appealing. The Constitution may say you can do something, but that doesn’t always mean people think you should do it.

Art can succeed without being widely appealing and without gaining popular approval. Political movements don’t work that way. In order to be successful, they have to be popular, and if they’re unpopular at first, they have to make themselves popular.

This, of course, brings me to Dante, for *The Inferno*, and the larger *Divine Comedy*, is as deeply political a document as anything Occupy could publish. You’ve grown up in an era of accepted political satire; suffice it to say that such expression was far rarer in Dante’s time. (One learns to view the presence of renowned figures and leaders in Hell very differently when one remembers that truth.)

But Dante’s work was brilliant precisely because it could be popular; it could appeal widely because it could be everything to everyone. By cramming in as many references and allusions as he did, the poet ensured his work would be artistically rewarding for the educated crowd that would read it. By writing it in the vernacular, he ensured that even a common man could read it. He made his points broadly without dumbing down his message; I can’t stress enough just how difficult it is to pull something like that off.

Of course, Dante wasn’t successful. He died in exile. He couldn’t ultimately save Florence from itself because the people in power there weren’t interested in saving themselves, particularly if it required sacrifice on their part. (This is what the young Ms. Francis bemoans above, and why Farinata will prove to be such an interesting figure when we meet him in a few circles’ time.)

But Dante hasn’t been relegated to a footnote in history, and I suspect it’s because he chose the right methods for delivering his message. If the common response of the Occupy protesters is that they “felt” like they had to join, the common response of the Dante scholar is that *The Divine Comedy* is “rewarding,” and the sense that Dante’s work is worth reading has kept it in the forefront of our academic pursuits for nearly seven centuries now.

From the “micro” perspective, Dante’s work interests me because of what it says about him, what it meant to be alive during his era, and how he saw himself in relation to the rest of the universe. And it’s little exchanges like the one between Waffles and the officer that grab my attention. For better or worse, the Occupy movement feels very anonymous; because there are no leaders, there’s no face that comes to mind when it’s mentioned. That distance helps keep it on the periphery of a lot of people’s awareness: remember the slogan, pass by the protesters. But we remember causes most strongly when we know their advocates. (You can’t say “civil rights” without conjuring an image of Dr. King in your listeners’ heads.)

Who would win more followers: the guy accusing the officer of looking like a “paid thug,” or the woman named Waffles? What’s responsible for the difference in appeal? How did Dante know how to end up on the right side of that appeal divide? And how will this movement avoid ending up on the wrong side of it?

In the end, I don’t know whether putting a personal face on the movement will enable it to last. I don’t know whether the protesters will clear out of the park tonight. And I don’t know whether they’ll ever appeal to people who don’t already agree with their cause and chosen methods of pursuing it.

I just know that Dante’s art has stood the test of time, and that we’re still making music and movies and video games that are either directly concerned with it or influenced by it. We can’t get it out of our system: artistically speaking, it’s made us cross our 7s and loop our 2s for centuries.

And that, in the simplest sense, is what anyone who advocates for change, who asks for your vote, or tries to change your mind is really asking of you, and what you must ask of others if you intend to solve some of the problems your generation will inherit from its parents: whether you’d like to write your numbers in a different script.

3. Return This Flower to the Dirt

Why make something disposable, like a building, when you can make something that lasts forever, like a greeting card?

Most of the work we create doesn’t have the urgency of Dante’s *Comedy*; most artists are not interesting in saving you, let alone themselves, through their art. Shakespeare didn’t create *Macbeth*, for example, in order to change the world. He was trying to entertain an audience he had every reason to fear he couldn’t reach; he couldn’t afford to write as transgressively or as fearlessly as Dante. He didn’t have Dante’s “free time” – or, frankly, his wealth of knowledge. So the play can be forgiven for containing less substance than the *Comedy*.

However, *Macbeth* and the *Comedy* share a subversive nature. We’ve talked at length about how Dante’s work buries vast multitudes of meaning within a fairly easily-followed plot structure. I would submit that Shakespeare does the same thing with *Macbeth* – that what appears to be a straightforward tale of hubristic overreach instead delivers a great deal of incisive commentary about its creator’s society. Now, the world Shakespeare crafts isn’t *supposed* to reflect his own; 10th-century Scotland was one country and hundreds of years removed from 17th-century England. Yet the play cannot help but reflect on the nature of human power: why we need it, how we use it, and whether we can handle it – particularly once our normal constraints have been removed. (It becomes apparent that Dante’s doing the same thing when popes start popping up in the underworld.)

Lady Macbeth has always been a difficult character to understand for anyone seeking to ascribe actual motives to her choices. (Explaining her decisions as “Well, she’s evil” is grade-school-level reckoning; Marvin Rosenberg’s supposition that Macbeth’s letter “changes” Lady Macbeth sounds very Francesca-esque, but still requires more support.) Audiences can spend a great deal of time puzzling over the nature of her emotional connection with her husband. Why is she so frustrated with him? Why do they keep fighting, yet seem to care deeply about each other? Do either of them grasp the other’s nature? For that matter, is there anyone else in the world who understands either of them so well?

In a society whose codes substantially curb your autonomy, it stands to reason that Lady Macbeth doesn’t get to interact with a large number of people. Even assuming the Macbeths have hired help to keep

their castle operational – a reasonable assumption – how close would someone in Lady’s Macbeth’s position get with the hired help? And in a society whose codes uphold a fairly strict, rigid definition of masculinity, it stands to reason that Macbeth’s public persona is fairly constructed – that his choices are governed by behavioral expectations rather than shaping them. Even a close friend, someone like Banquo, could not have the same insight into Macbeth that his wife has. In a very real sense, the Macbeths only have each other.

This is not how things *should* have been, not even how they *needed* to be; it is simply how they *were*. Human history is rife with societies that upheld common beliefs without examining their fairness, efficacy, or necessity – and almost always at a price. Lady Macbeth, as we’ll see in a later blog, represents a great deal of squandered potential; had she been born male, this would not have been the case. (*Game of Thrones*’s Cersei Lannister represents a spin on this convention; she is a female figure crafted very much in the Lady Macbeth tradition, although she benefits from her author’s greater interest in her motives and mindset.) And there’s no reason to squander that potential! Neither Macbeth’s nor Lady Macbeth’s lives were helped by the rigid codes others expected them to obey, and neither of them knew how to function when they started coloring outside of the lines.

It seems, then, that the same danger lurks in our art and in our social codes, our political beliefs, our expectations regarding how the world should work. Dante believes art deranges an unprepared soul when it is accepted without examination. King and Connelly show that flawed political engagement can be just as harmful, and on an even wider scale – that if we accept statements uncritically, and never expose ourselves to alternative viewpoints, we will eventually construct a society that hurts us all. Worse still: if we cannot figure out how to communicate with, reach out to, or connect with each other, we will never even recognize that we *have*.

King, like many great creators throughout the ages, wasn’t operating from an original template when he wrote the *Drum Major* sermon. He was re-working and re-interpreting a homily from a liberal white preacher, J. Wallace Hamilton, that had first been delivered over 15 years prior to a much smaller audience. But just as the best cover songs take the seeds of a pre-existing piece and radically rework them to newer, more profound effect, King greatly expands the scope of the discussion Hamilton wanted to provoke when he first called attention to our seemingly inherent need to feel special. To King, this need had insidious effects that far outstripped the simple self-destructive impulse to keep up with the Joneses. It was starting to tear us apart.

If Connelly’s piece is any indication, we have not made as much progress as we’d like to believe we have since King’s day. Opponents are quickly demonized, intentions assumed, explanations offered – all accepted without examination. Interpretations that fit into preexisting frameworks (spoiled, uppity athletes don’t know their place; white people blithely want to keep exploiting black people) crowd out other explanations that draw on more data. People assume they have access to enough facts to render judgments when they’ve barely scratched the surface of what they’d need to know in order to form an informed opinion.

And as King pointed out, we are particularly susceptible to explanations that play on our need to feel special, because those are the least likely to be examined more closely. How many times have we been told that we live in the greatest country on Earth? And how many people spend even a month in at least ten other countries for comparison’s sake? (You probably wouldn’t take someone’s opinion on music seriously if they’d only listened to ten albums.) This goes doubly for social expectations: the codes that govern how we behave in public are the least likely to be examined, because questioning them automatically attracts negative attention. (Why do we say the Pledge of Allegiance publicly? Why do we make people say it as children, when we have no idea what it means and when our “allegiance” doesn’t matter?)

Inevitably, someone “outside” *does* question how something is done, or why something exists. People hunker down into their separate, special camps. Even King, one of humanity’s greatest communicators, could

only bridge so many divides, and only so far. And the cycle repeats itself, controversy after controversy, as the fissures in society widen.

As we've discussed multiple times this semester, *it's very difficult to communicate effectively*. (Can you explain how chocolate tastes?) And it's harder still when we place arbitrary limits on ourselves, as the social expectations on Lady Macbeth, about what should and shouldn't be discussed. Perhaps you've heard the old saw about how religion and politics are off-limits topics of conversation in polite company. That strikes me as insane. How are you supposed to grasp a person's perspective if you won't pay attention to his/her beliefs – if, in fact, social expectations leave him/her afraid to offer them up? Where are you going to find the context you'd need to understand his/her thought process? And why shouldn't we talk about politics? Aren't we all equally members of society, and therefore all invested in figuring out how to improve this thing we've built and are still honing? Shouldn't we all be curious about learning as much as possible, since we all have votes – and our votes remain an effective means of affecting change?

To behave as though another person shouldn't discuss their beliefs, and that you have no intention of sharing yours, is to tell them: *I am fundamentally disinterested in actually understanding how you see the world, how you feel, how you really think. I am only interested in dealing with a mask. And I will only provide you with the most superficial understanding of me.* And when we perpetuate these expectations, we give rise to systems in which politeness, repression, and ignorance go hand in hand.

Well, Dante didn't care about writing politely. The *Comedy* is by turns gross, shocking, offensive, and disturbing. It's also beautiful, intricate, profound, and courageous. You get works like the *Comedy* when creators cut loose and create – and the works get remembered when people engage with them and dig in. It's the digging-in, the examination, that's important, because times change, and people change; the only way art doesn't fade into obsolescence is if it remains relevant, and it's tough to craft something in a static medium (like a book, or a script) that can stay that way.

But the best works – a speech, a film, an advertisement – provoke conversation, appreciation, and re-evaluation. The art doesn't have to change if the way it's viewed evolves, but it's also OK if the art changes. (I'm sure some see the changes Richard Scarry made to a book many, including me, considered a foundational childhood text as pandering or obnoxious, but I think he was very brave to make them.) We don't perform Lady Macbeth's role the way we used to. Nor, for that matter, do we perform Macbeth's. We certainly don't read the *Comedy* the way Dante intended. (Can you imagine what he would have thought of our world?) But I think we're richer, not poorer, for connecting with the works in our own new way. We don't just come to understand the plays more effectively; we come to a greater understanding of ourselves.

The current furor seizing college campuses will die down, and if history is any indicator, it will do so after some changes have occurred, but before *change* can take root. It is not enough to simply say what you wish to say; self-gratification is not the ultimate goal of communication. But there seems to be little appetite on either side of the present-day battles for reaching those who do not already agree, and plenty of enthusiasm for inflaming the resentments one's side already nurses.

King bemoaned the misapplication of the drum major instinct as it pertained to racial discord in America. He hated what our belief in the necessity of exclusivity enabled us to rationalize to ourselves. In reading media accounts of the protests, it seems that twisted version of it is alive and well in too many places; I'm struck by how many times groups intentionally advance their agendas with intentionally inflammatory language – language that not only does nothing to convince those who disagree to change their stances, but that does much to make those who could have joined the cause feel unwelcome. And I wonder: what is the point of communicating this way? Who thought this would work?

Four years ago, the Occupy movement dominated the discourse. It was passionate. It was angry. It was righteous. Who even thinks about it now? How much change resulted from all that sound and fury?

I think about Ciacco – his desperate need to be remembered, even notoriously, by people who probably had moved on with their lives without a second thought. I think about Ser Brunetto Latini's lesson, so close to Gilgamesh's: that you live forever if you write the right work, build the right foundations. Your influence can echo through the ages. And I wonder, at times, about the same things Connelly writes about near the end of his piece; the things King urged his followers to consider during his sermon; the issues Dante and Macbeth raise in their works; the example Scarry left when he edited his own: Do I unwittingly hold views my descendants will find uneducated, misguided, even abhorrent? Am I arrogant and blind to issues I should notice? Do I perpetuate the conditions that worsen the very problems I wish we could solve?

And will we come down on the right side of history?

+ Do you believe Francesca's argument – that art not only can affect our behavior, but reverse it? Can art turn us, however briefly or permanently, into someone else?

+ How responsible are people for their actions? In other words, how much of each choice is due to personal agency, and how much is due to influence? How much is due to upbringing or culture? Are people ever blameless for the things they do?

+ Censorship stems from both the positive (the desire to protect and instruct) and the negative (fear and, at times, ignorance). But even censorship has its risks. The obvious danger that results from overprotection is stagnation. Is the risk of stagnating worth the ability to protect people from harm?

+ How do you define *art*, and what gives something artistic value? Can, say, a video game really be art? Can a painting fail to be art?

+ Do we need to protect people from art at all? Do we need to monitor and regulate consumption of art in order to protect an audience from itself? If we didn't monitor or regulate what, how, where, and when art could be experienced, what would the consequences be for both people and society at large, both for bad and for good?

+ Should we update artistic works, or modify aspects of them that grow not simply obsolete, but offensive? Or should we leave them as they were created? (Consider recent examples, ala Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.)

+ I alluded to the silent responsibility that comes with enjoying the freedom of expression – i.e., we must use that right without abusing it. The Occupy protesters who planned to resist police efforts to clear their camps would likely have disagreed with me, and stated instead that the right doesn't include any shades of gray: if we're given an inalienable right, we should take the "inalienable" part as literally as possible, and not worry about restricting ourselves according to anything other than the law as written. How do you interpret the First Amendment as it pertains to the behaviors we can engage in versus what we should engage in? Are there times when we should self-censor?

+ Do we need to see things that offend us, or can we grow just fine without pushing those boundaries?

+ If Emily Francis speaks truthfully, what implications do her words hold for our society's future?

+ Does King's warning about the "drum major instinct" still have relevance in our contemporary world?

+ How can political movements achieve their goals in today's fragmented society? How can someone convince another person to support his/her goals?

+ Which current attitudes and beliefs – social, political, cultural – do you believe will be abandoned within five decades? How effective are we as a society at revising our laws and expectations when the need arises?

Section Title #1: "9 Billion," Abandoned Pools, *Sublime Currency*

Section Title #2: "Closing Time," Semisonic, *Feeling Strangely Fine*

Section Title #3: "The Good Left Undone," Rise Against, *The Sufferer and the Witness*
