

### Queue The Countdown

#### <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SH1Y-KpRhoY>; read along!

#### “I use language and literature as a way to orchestrate a framework

#### To think and inquire

#### about American life,

#### including the legacy of American violence.

#### My name is Ocean Vuong, and I’m a poet and a writer.

#### I grew up surrounded by Vietnamese refugee women who used

#### *Stories to create portals*

#### The story is a virtual reality into another world,

#### Out of the present

#### But it’s also a record of where we’ve been

#### And a story is an

#### *Inheritance*

#### ‘Night Sky with Exit Wounds’ was a series of poems that attempts to cast a separate mythology

#### Out of geopolitical violence.

#### And I used elders and predecessors like Homer and a lot of the Greek classical texts and recast them in the guise and the gaze of

#### Vietnamese American life in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

#### One of the central questions in ‘On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous,’ having been written as a

#### *Letter to a mother who will never read it*

#### *Is ultimately*

#### *Does language matter?*

#### Is it worth it to speak your mind and your truth in fiction, or otherwise

#### If an audience,

#### Even if it is an audience of one

#### *Is never promised?*

#### *Does it matter?*

#### Often we demand of the American novel to be

#### Cohesive

#### A monolithic statement of a generation

#### But having grown up post 9/11,

#### Cohesion was not part of my generation’s imagination,

#### nor our language,

#### or our self-identity

#### And I felt that if I were to write

#### My version of an American novel,

#### It would

#### have to

#### look more like

#### fragmentation.

#### In my Zen Buddhist practice,

#### one of the most privileged state of minds

#### is not the expert,

#### it’s not the master

#### it’s what’s called the

#### beginner’s mind.

#### The beginner’s mind is a mind that

#### Approaches the natural world, and the phenomenas within it

#### With utmost curiosity

#### And I think one of the most perennial powers of an artistic mind is

#### *Awe and wonder before the world.”*

### There’s beauty in a love letter

**I want to hold hands in which each caress**

**molds my palm into yours**

**and yours into mine**

**Even when you’re gone my hands will**

**hold you with**

**just as much care as the fateful day**

**you sculpted them.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**Dear [\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]**

#### *The most beautiful part of a text is where it’s headed. The most beautiful part of a love letter is who it reaches. [[2]](#footnote-2)*

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#### A body is constructed both by what is *present* and what is *absent*.

#### When you spoke, my ears rung. And I was left with exit wounds that splattered across the night sky.[[3]](#footnote-3)

#### Thus, it is no coincidence that in this absence – when bodies are omitted from space – there is a compulsion to

#### “touch each other just to prove we are still here”[[4]](#footnote-4)

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### Three months ago I danced with a man who called himself immortal

#### A queering of both technics and texts that color “outside of the lines”[[5]](#footnote-5) to radically makeover Asian America and debate. When I placed the love letter in the mailbox it was drenched in rain and almost torn apart.

#### I’ll never know if he received it. Some nights I stay up *speculating* that he did.

#### And as I thought about him, my phone rung with 10 voicemails from someone toxic

Tsing 15 (Tsing, Anna, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Professor of anthropology at the University of Santa Cruz and recipient of the Huxley Memorial Medal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Princeton University Press, 2015)

To listen to and tell a rush of stories is a method. And why not make the strong claim and call it a science, an addition to knowledge? Its research object is contaminated diversity; its unit of analysis is the indeterminate encounter. To learn anything we must revitalize arts of noticing and include ethnography and natural history. But we have a problem with scale. A rush of stories cannot be neatly summed up. Its scales do not nest neatly; they draw attention to interrupting geographies and tempos. These interruptions elicit more stories. This is the rush of stories’ power as a science. Yet it is just these interruptions that step out of the bounds of most modern science, which demands the possibility for infinite expansion without changing the research framework. Arts of noticing are considered archaic because they are unable to “scale up” in this way. The ability to make one’s research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research questions, has become a hallmark of modern knowledge. To have any hope of thinking with mushrooms, we must get outside this expectation. In this spirit, I lead a foray into mushroom forests as “anti-plantations.”

The expectation of scaling up is not limited to science. Progress itself has often been defined by its ability to make projects expand without changing their framing assumptions. This quality is “scalability.” The term is a bit confusing, because it could be interpreted to mean “able to be discussed in terms of scale.” Both scalable and nonscalable projects, however, can be discussed in relation to scale. When Fernand Braudel explained history’s “long durée” or Niels Bohr showed us the quantum atom, these were not projects of scalability, although they each revolutionized thinking about scale. Scalability, in contrast, is the ability of a project to change scales smoothly without any change in project frames. A scalable business, for example, does not change its organization as it expands. This is possible only if business relations are not transformative, changing the business as new relations are added. Similarly, a scalable research project admits only data that already fit the research frame. Scalability requires that project elements be oblivious to the indeterminacies of encounter; that’s how they allow smooth expansion. Thus, too, scalability banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might change things.

Scalability is not an ordinary feature of nature. Making projects scalable takes a lot of work. Even after that work, there will still be interactions between scalable and nonscalable project elements. Yet, despite the contributions of thinkers such as Braudel and Bohr, the connection between scaling up and the advancement of humanity has been so strong that scalable elements receive the lion’s share of attention. The nonscalable becomes an impediment. It is time to turn attention to the nonscalable, not only as objects for description but also as incitements to theory.

### In my 8 years in this activity, I’ve read more affs off my phone than a laptop on late nights when I can’t go to sleep

#### It’s come to a point where my class readings have blurred with opencaselist

#### *~~Antitrust Controversy Area Proposal~~*~~, 2021,~~ [~~http://156.26.181.164/forum/index.php/topic,7654.0.html?PHPSESSID=979c6cbf0438c9d69427cc1128e0ad8e~~](http://156.26.181.164/forum/index.php/topic,7654.0.html?PHPSESSID=979c6cbf0438c9d69427cc1128e0ad8e)

College debate needs a domestic topic that foregrounds fundamental questions about how our economy should be structured. The concentration of market power in the hands of a few firms is one of the defining features of our current marketplace, it’s widely recognized as a problem worth addressing, and yet deep structural policy change is unlikely to be forthcoming. That makes the topic an ideal mix of timely but unlikely to fundamentally change week-to-week. The resolution can be written to require affirmatives to make large-scale change from the status quo, one of the biggest factors in good debates. Critical ground is plentiful on both sides. Curtailing the power of large corporations is an accessible debate topic that could help in recruitment and retention.

#### I hate Judge Prefs

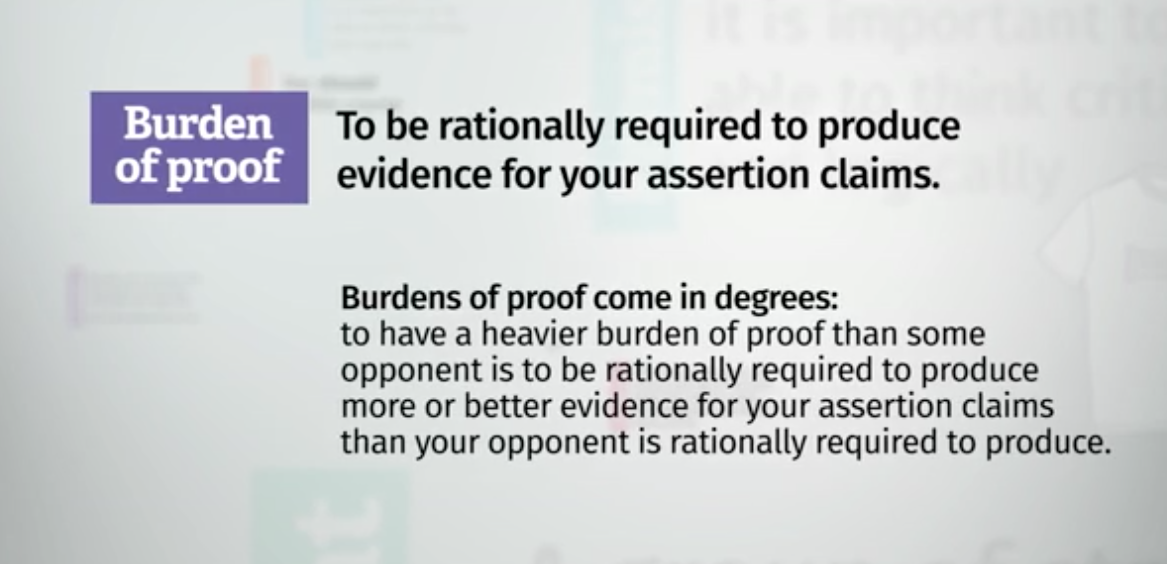
*There is so much*

*I need to tell you – but I only earned*

*One life.****[[6]](#footnote-6)*** *[one round]*

### My first day of debate the first thing I learned was

#### ~~A Burden of Proof AND a Burden of Rejoinder~~



#### I fell asleep at my desk so I kind of forgot what happened…

#### So much for the *Model Citizen*

#### Phu, Thy: *Picturing Model Citizens* (Temple University Press, 2011), Introduction: Clasped Hands and Clenched Fists, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/18981>

The civil engineers’ handshake in Russell’s photograph is only one of many gestures extended at moments when the parameters of citizenship are most vexed and contested. More than merely an accidental detail in Russell’s iconic photograph, civility is a trope **that surfaces** in signal moments when the civil rights associated **with citizenship** are **under greatest threat.** Perhaps the most notorious use of photographs as a popular means of constructing national identity occurred during World War II, as a means of protecting the “good” citizen, then the law-abiding Chinese American, against his “bad” counterpart, the enemy alien, the Japanese American, who, in the wake of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, was stripped of civil liberties. A brief primer in Life offered what the magazine described as the “handbook for Americans,” relying on photographs to provide guidance on “how to tell Japs from the Chinese.”6 In this primer, photographs, cursive script, and typescript intersect to parallel the triangulation between the groups that the feature describes as “U.S. citizens”; “U.S. Chinese,” who are victims of undeserved “emotional outburst[s]”;7 and the true culprits, the Japanese, who are “enemy aliens.”8 **According to this formulation, the citizen evaluates noncitizens**, **suggesting that the category of citizenship is constructed through encounters** with photography in addition **to** more familiar sites of engagement such as **the law**. At the same time, **citizens are advised, however indirectly, to comport themselves civilly**—that is, **to exercise judgment about their behavior, by judging first that the offending subjects deserve their wrath.**

Civility triangulates the unmarked but obviously white “citizen,” the “bad” enemy alien, and the “good” U.S. Chinese, within a constantly contested continuum of citizenship that obscures the arbitrariness of these categories by normalizing them. Sociologist Claire Jean Kim proposes the concept of “racial triangulation” to explain the complex constituencies of Asian America, which are formed in relation to the racialization of whiteness and blackness.9 Although the Afro-Asian nuances of this process, which are explored in a number of important studies, are not my primary concern here, my approach to varied racial encounters within this book upholds while unsettling Yen Le Espiritu’s notion of Asian American “panethnicity” (or strategic alliances between disparate groups) by drawing inspiration from the dynamic dimensions of the concept of triangulation.10 Indeed, embodied forms of civility are often posed as answers to such troubling questions about citizenship as: Who is a citizen? What are the rights of citizenship, and who may claim these rights? This book also argues that at still other times, civility serves as a strategic resistance to these provisional answers, which can be as troubling as the questions that they address. Civility, in other words, “frames” or shapes the meanings of citizenship. In so doing, civility also articulates and disarticulates the parameters of Asian America. Picturing Model Citizens: Civility in Asian American Visual Culture explores civility’s critical role in defining and redefining citizenship.

**Civility is so central to the formation of Asian America that it lies at the heart of one of the community’s most familiar and controversial figures, the model minority**. A figure that debuted in 1966 with the publication of William Petersen’s infamous New York Times Magazine article, “Success Story, JapaneseAmerican Style,”11 but was anticipated decades earlier, the model minority casts a long shadow that continues to influence debates on citizenship today. Described as “deeply ambivalent,”12 **the model minority inspires** commentary about the figure’s varied ideological functions: as evidence of **success to be emulated by other minorities**;13 **as an inspiring touchstone for the rejuvenation of white Americans** who, to their chagrin, find themselves questioning their formerly certain moral, intellectual, and economic superiority;14 as an equivocal discourse embraced **by some as an affirmative mode of self-identification**;15 as no less injurious a stereotype as the Yellow Peril specters that it ostensibly replaced and for that reason, to be disparaged; or, even more complexly, as a double-edged means of generating cultural and social capital through an exploitive “system of signification.”1

Despite Victor Bascara’s astute observation that the model minority is unmatched as “a visible priority for Asian American mobilization,”17 however, **these** extensive **debates are surprisingly consistent in their focus on productivity and self-sufficiency.**18 Notably, **proponents of the model minority myth focus on labor as the basis for achievement of full citizenship and its attendant rights of political representation and social recognition, aligning the efforts of the indentured laborer and his industrious descendants within the Horatio Alger fantasy of bootstrap gumption, obscuring the fact that, as Colleen Lye has convincingly shown, labor was the basis for exploitation and exclusion**.19 Addressing a later moment, Robert G. Lee likewise notes that this aspect of what Frank Chin has elsewhere termed “racist love”20 (in contrast to the “racist hate” projected at other minorities) is produced within a Cold War context, in which “stoic patience, political obedience, and self-improvement was a critically important narrative of ethnic **liberalism** that **simultaneously promoted racial equality and sought to contain demands for social transformation**.”21 If the ideological battle waged abroad required “containing” enemies of capitalism, containment on the domestic front served a no less urgent function, as Lee also points out, of **rewarding accommodation and assimilation while punishing militancy**, as part of a carefully crafted policy to thwart communist propagandists eager to pounce on any signs of internal dissension. The model minority’s assimilability handily serves the ends of containment in a process that links, as Mary Dudziak persuasively argues, foreign and domestic policies within a framework of “Cold War Civil Rights.”22

On the one hand, **the model minority myth** seeks to remedy injurious exclusions from the full rights of political and social citizenship, **dangling accommodation and assimilation as compensation** for a history of exclusion and alienation. On the other hand, the remedy, premised on the Protestant work ethic of self-sufficiency, is at best partial, for it **shifts the duties of Americanization and uplift to the shoulders of the aspiring immigrant and absolves the state from participation in, not to mention responsibility for, this process.** At the same time, this aspect of the model minority myth retains a residue of foreignness: the very qualities that make the model minority a congenial subject for American accommodation and assimilation—silence, discipline, obedience—cause worry when they are construed as an inhuman penchant for deceptiveness and robotic hyperefficiency. Vilified as part of the Yellow Peril menace, the inscrutable Asian is thus, as Lye incisively points out, the obverse of the beneficent model minority, “two aspects of the same, long-running racial form, a form whose most salient feature, whether it has been made the basis for exclusion or assimilation, is the trope of economic selfsufficiency.”23

### Desires and Memories In Redux: To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before[[7]](#footnote-7)

Last night I danced with someone who called himself immortal.

Planets navigated charcoal trails

stretching for eternity

But you stopped,

leaving streams of cobalt

in your wake

As we walked, you told me –

the wonders of creation

The way life becomes engineered,

learning – slowly – to take up a presence

that could one day betray its own mortality

Under navy skies and jasmine stars we danced

Twilight flooded darkened walls,

casting shadows that pirouetted for lifetimes

And flames spun on stubborn earth

That night I learned of my own mortality,

With each kiss,

I surrendered my lungs

as they drowned in navy skies

and the breath of immortality.

I surrendered my heart

so that you would surrender yourself,

to a death so temporary,

I wonder if you still remember it

Last month I danced with someone who called himself immortal

I wonder if he still remembers me.

### The Violence of An Expectation Bleeds Just as Red

[[8]](#footnote-8)A picture containing text, colorful, bright

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### Memories Left Adrift

#### How do we write about generations of memories? More importantly, how can we write *with* these generations of memory?

#### *All texts are human and, thus, sociable*

#### Consequently,

#### Interludes of words, footnotes, and space resonate and build off one another to create worlds and imaginations of their own making. To speak and to write through generations is when discrete paragraphs transmute into stanzas. *Generations bleed together*. Intergenerational inquiry is best questioned intertextually: in between line(age)s of distinct topic sentences, punctuations, and indentations are entangled enjambments, apostrophes, and conceits that inherit the voice of their predecessors.

#### *“Isn’t the saddest thing in the world, Ma? A comma forced to be a period.”[[9]](#footnote-9)*

#### Study in postmemory seeks to examine how post-war generations take on the memory of war through the “images, stories, behaviors, and affects” of their predecessors.[[10]](#footnote-10) Despite not experiencing the war first-hand, latter-generation Vietnamese Americans have inherited the “nightmares,” “mistrust,” and “depression,”[[11]](#footnote-11) that echo into the present.

#### Suffering is not static, especially when kept silent. J’ani amuyu.

#### By speaking to and with the bodies, desires, and memories of Asian American generations, this letter has been an invitation to a diasporic conversation. Moving beyond silence, inverting the canon and syntax of Asian America offers a poetic intervention that exceeds both the content and form of a single (em)bodied experience.

#### Consider: a love so deep that even when the letter didn’t reach it translated (in)to content

#### Desire: *because a single legacy simply isn’t enough to hold all your queer possibilities*[[12]](#footnote-12)



### I know I’m a Debater But I’ve always been a Slow Reader – Here’s What I could Read About the New Aff

Jonathan Beller interviewed by David Richardson ’21, \*is Adjunct Professor of English, Film Studies, and Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies at Barnard College, \*\*works at Paradox Public Relations, “MEDIA FUTURIST JONATHAN BELLER BELIEVES THE MATRIX IS SOCIAL REALISM AND SCROLLING SOCIAL MEDIA IS EXPLOITATION”, Paradox Politics, 4/19/21, <https://paradoxpolitics.com/2021/04/media-futurist-jonathan-beller-believes-the-matrix-is-social-realism-and-scrolling-instagram-is-exploitation/> \*added notes for who is speaking

[JB] It’s not the same. Our paper money is not what it used to be either. It’s a difficult question because the history of money, of merchant or mercantile capital, of banks, financial instruments and now financial innovation, synthetic finance and crypto, is for the last 700 years at least also the history of the expansion of the networks of capitalism and their capacity for extraction and liquidity preservation. When most people think about money, they know they can use it to pay for something; it has value. Why does it have value? Because everyone else thinks it has value. But why does everyone else think that is a deeper question, and the deeper question has to do with the history of exchange, the rise of commodification, the power of states and institutional exploitations, inertia, questions about issuance, and control of money supply, credit, central banks as lenders of last resort. Centralized issuance allows states to issue bonds and spend. They become the most creditworthy and everybody down the line in the credit system charges more interest to people who have less credit, so that the poorest people pay the most for their money. All these institutions and institutionalized structures are part of what money is, but we don’t really see that. We just understand it as something to transact with, when we have liquidity. And we understand it as the thing we must have if we want to live.

### My Love Language is Music: Scrolling Through Lyrics…

#### When hearing – *when reading* – this sentence how will you attune yourself into this textual ensemble?

#### Mom, if you can hear me, I think I made it Twenty thousand fans front the stage, I'm standing on I want you to know I appreciate it One day I'll come home we can celebrate Mom, I gotta go, the curtain's calling All the way from Rome, I'm really sorry Tell my little sister, I said hey One day I'll come home we can celebrate[[13]](#footnote-13)

#### *How’s your flow look*?

1. **Welcome to Notes App Poetry!** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Something, something, “this is only one round,” nobody cares -** Restatement of Ocean Vuong from *Someday I’ll Love Ocean Vuong*: “The most beautiful part of your body is where it’s headed.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **See** **Ocean Vuong’s Night Sky With Exit Wounds -** [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **RIP this cuz of zoom, but we tried <3 -** Vuong, Ocean. 2016. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*. Copper Canyon Press. 57. Poem: *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Welcome to the Footnotes! Glad you could make it:**

   Bryson, Mary, and Suzanne de Castell. “Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect.” *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l’éducation* 18, no. 3 (1993): 299. Citation includes paraphrasing that precedes the quotation [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **Start the countdown for senior final debates!** Vuong, Ocean 2016. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds.* Copper Canyon Press. 62. Poem: *Untitled (Blue, Green, and Brown): oil on canvas: Mark Rothko: 1952).* The part “[one round]” was not part of the original poem. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Reference to “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before,” a 2018 film directed by Susan Johnson [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I talked to robots and then send me what you’re seeing above: https://www.wombo.art/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Vuong, Ocean. 2019. On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous: A Novel. [New York]: Random House Large Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Nguyen, Kelly. “Queering Telemachus: Ocean Vuong, Postmemories and the Vietnam War.” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, October 10, 2021. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Depaul, A. (2013). *Trauma at Root of Mental Health Issues Among Vietnamese*. <https://voiceofoc.org/2013/02/trauma-at-root-of-mental-health-issues-among-vietnamese/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. **You prepped the queer evolution K? Fear not, here’s the redux:** Restatement of Evangeline Heilger from *Global Justice and Desire: Queering Economy*: “because ‘the economy’ simply isn’t enough to hold all your queer possibilities.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. **Dirty Heads** – Celebrate: listen pls https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzmC7U57fQk [↑](#footnote-ref-13)