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APPOINTMENT

Postdoctoral Associate in Philosophy and the Humanities, Yale University. 2017-2019

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Philosophy. University of Chicago 2011-2017
Self-Opacity, Human Agency, and Ethics
M.A. Philosophy. New School for Social Research 2011-2017
On Sublimation: Freud, Nietzsche, and Kristeva
B.A. Philosophy, Cinema Studies. University of Toronto. 2002-2005

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION:

Moral Philosophy and its History
Kant's Moral Philosophy
19th and 20th Century European Philosophy
Moral Psychology

AREAS OF COMPETENCE:

Aesthetics, especially Philosophy of Film
Feminist Philosophy
Philosophy of Race

DISSERTATION:

Self-Opacity, Human Agency, and Ethics

Committee: Candace Vogler, Daniel Brudney, Jonathan Lear, Kyla Ebels-Duggan (Northwestern)

In my dissertation, I argue that self-opacity—not knowing why we do what we do—is actually an essential feature of human agency that can contribute to productively to human life. While in simple cases we tend to know what we are doing and why, I argue that in ethically complex circumstances where our values and self-conceptions are at stake, we are often not clear why we do what we do, we do not understand our motivations, and our aims are opaque. I show that the concept and experience of self-opacity should occupy a more central place in any sophisticated, realistic theory of moral agency and moral psychology. Moreover, insofar as self-opacity is relevant to ethics, it must be understood, not as a mere fact of human life that we can know theoretically; rather we must analyze self-opacity *practically*. Thus I reject philosophical positions that rely on an overly idealized conception of the agent's first-personal perspective (for instance, C. Korsgaard, R. Moran), and yet I maintain that we can only appreciate the practical relevance of self-opacity from *within* that perspective (and so I reject those who offer third-personal theories of agency and self-opacity; see N. Arpaly). I propose that we understand

self-opacity as essential to human agency thanks to two mutually implicating dimensions of human life: our animality and our sociality. I argue that these dimensions of our practical lives resist comprehension from the practical perspective and yet cannot be relegated to the domain of what can be known purely theoretically or observationally. Self-opacity is in this sense the reflexive dimension of our finitude. Finally, I outline that self-opacity can contribute productively to ethical life insofar as self-opacity is constitutive of moral development, self-critique, and important forms of dependency, whereby it is possible not just to tolerate self-opacity, but to live well with it.

PUBLICATIONS

I. Articles in Peer-Reviewed Journals

1. "Unity and Synthesis in the Ego Ideal: Reading Freud's Concept Through Kant's Philosophy." *American Imago* (2012). Vol. 69, No. 3, 351-381.

II. Articles in Edited Collections

1. "I Want to Know More About You: Knowing and Acknowledging in Cavell and *Chinatown*." *Cavell and Aesthetic Understanding*. Ed. Garry Hagberg (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
2. "The Space of Pathos: Meaning, Anxiety, and Ethics in Heidegger's *Being and Time*." *Existential Philosophy and Ethics*. Eds. Hans Feger and Manuela Hackel. (De Gruyter, 2013) pp. 329-340.
3. "Strange New Beauty: On Sublimation." *Cincinnati Romance Review* (2013) 35:135-150.

Papers Under Review:

"Kantian Self-Conceit and the Two Guises of Authority" (minor revise and resubmit)
"Self-Opacity and Motivational Indeterminacy"

Papers in Progress:

"The Paradox of Apology."
"Self-Conceit, Illusion, and Self-Observation."

SELECT PUBLICATIONS IN ART CRITICISM

(complete list available at franceyrussell.com)

- 2018 On Claire Denis' *High Life*. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, November.
"Exercises in Self-Destruction: On *First Reformed*." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July.
"Haneke and the Technology of Intimacy." *Boston Review*, April.
- 2017 "The Spirit of Things: On *Personal Shopper*." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, April.
"Roh, nicht medium." Translation of "Unspeakable Appetites" for *Der Freitag*, March.
"Unspeakable Appetites." *Lenny*, March.
- 2016 "An Education: On Barry Jenkin's *Moonlight*." *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

- “The Politics of Self-Knowledge in Jason Bourne.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, August.
 “On the Movement for Lynching Memorials.” *Lenny*, June.
 “Images to Work With, in *Son of Saul*.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, February.
- 2015 “How to Be Together: Andrew Haigh’s *45 Years*.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December.
 “The Quietly Revolutionary *Carol*.” *Lenny*, November.
- 2014 “Repetition and Difference in *Two Days One Night*.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December.
 “Kara Walker’s *A Subtlety*.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, June.
- 2013 “Places of Remembrance.” *The Millions*, September.

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

- 2016 Charlotte Newcombe Fellowship.
 National fellowship awarded for research on ethical values in the humanities and social sciences.
- 2016 Mellon Humanities Dissertation Fellowship, University of Chicago.
 Dissertation completion fellowship in the Humanities Division.
- 2016 APA Graduate Student Travel Award.
- 2013 DAAD Language Scholarship.
- 2008 New School University Dean’s Fellowship.
 Given to one student annually based on outstanding academic record.
- 2008 New School Tuition Scholarship.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

- 2019 “Towards a Critical Theory of Self-Knowledge.” Practical Philosophy Workshop. University of Chicago (invited).
- 2018 “The Illusion of Self-Conceit.” New York German Idealism Workshop (invited).
 “Aesthetic Self-Knowledge in Kant’s Third *Critique*.” ACLA (refereed).
 “The Paradox of Apology.” Annual Meeting, Central Division of the American Philosophical Association (refereed).
- 2017 “The Paradox of Apology.” Humanistic Ethics Conference. Rice University (invited).

- 2016 “A Perverse Nature: Freud’s Drive Theory and the Idea of Second Nature.”
Die Kunst der zweiten Natur. Goethe University Frankfurt.
- “Kant on Self-Opacity and Self-Conceit.” Annual Meeting, Central Division of the APA (refereed).
- “Opacity is the Rule: On Nomy Arpaly’s Account of Agency.” Phenomenology Research Group, Loyola University Chicago (invited).
- 2015 “Kant on Self-Conceit and Respect for Persons.” The Form of Practical Knowledge (Conference in Honor of Stephen Engstrom). Leipzig Universität.
- “Repetition and Difference in Film.” Vanderbilt University (invited).
- 2014 “Morality and Victimhood: Nietzschean Objections, Nietzschean Possibilities.” Annual Meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (refereed).
- “Moral Self-Opacity and Moral Authority.” Society of Fellows Conference, University of Chicago (refereed).
- 2012 “Life in Truth: On *Parrhesia* in Late Foucault.” Annual Meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (refereed).
- “I Want to Know More About You: Knowing and Acknowledging in Polanski’s *Chinatown*.” Research Workshop of Identity, Memory and Experience. Universidad Carlos III, Madrid.
- 2011 “The Struggle of Sense: Wittgenstein, Suffering, and Nonsense.” Pratt Institute (refereed).
- “What We Talk About When We Talk About Pain: Wittgenstein on Pain and Language.” North American Wittgenstein Society, Central Division of the APA (refereed).
- “The Space of Pathos: Meaning, Anxiety, and Ethics in *Being and Time*.” *Existenzphilosophie und Ethik*. Freie Universität Berlin (refereed).
- 2010 “Unity and Organization in Freud’s Ego Ideal.” New School for Social Research, Psychoanalytic Theory Workshop (invited).
2009. “Active Interpretation in Kristeva and Nietzsche.” *Kristeva in Process*. Humboldt University in Berlin (refereed).

COMMENTARIES

- 2019 Author Meets Critics session for Melissa Merritt’s *Kant on Reflection and Virtue*. Society of German Idealism and Romanticism at the Central APA, Denver CO.
- Colloquium session for Lucy Allais’ “Against Disembodiment and for Disharmony in the Kantian Self,” Pacific APA, Vancouver BC.

- 2018 Response to Mavis Biss “Friendship, Trust, and Moral Perfection.” North American Kant Society Biennial Conference. Vancouver, BC.
- 2016 Response to Rachel Zuckert’s “Herder and Ossian: Aesthetics and (In)authenticity.” German Philosophical Aesthetics Conference at the Chicago Area German Philosophy Consortium, DePaul University.
- 2015 Response to D.N. Rodowick’s book *Philosophy’s Artful Conversation*. 3CT New Book Salon, University of Chicago.

PUBLIC TALKS AND INTERVIEWS

- 2018 American Philosophical Association Member Interview.
<https://blog.apaonline.org/2018/07/13/apa-member-interview-francey-russell/>
- 2016 “Self-Opacity and Bodily Being (with Picasso’s *Half-Length Female Nude*).” *Expose Yourself*. A talk series at the Art Institute of Chicago in which academics use the permanent collection to present their research to the public.

TEACHING

Yale University

- 2019 The Concept of Recognition. Yale University. Philosophy, Humanities (seminar)

Directed Studies Program. Yale University.

Directed Studies offers a select group of first-year students an intense interdisciplinary introduction to seminal texts of Western civilization. The Philosophy stream covers most key figures from Plato to the 20th century.

- 2018 Self-Knowledge and Ethics. Yale University. Philosophy, Humanities (seminar)

Directed Studies Program, Philosophy section, Yale University.

- 2017 Directed Studies Program, Philosophy section, Yale University.

University of Chicago

- 2015 Kant and Existentialism: Autonomy and Morality. (seminar)

- 2015 Introduction to Political Philosophy. (Teaching Assistant for Ben Laurence)

- 2015 Introduction to Ancient Philosophy. (Teaching Assistant for Agnes Callard)

- 2014 Critique of Humanism. (Teaching Assistant for Candace Vogler)

Vanderbilt University.

- 2011 Introduction to Ethics. Vanderbilt University. (Teaching Assistant for Larry May)

Pace University

2009 Philosophical Perspectives on Feminism. Pace University. (seminar)

Pedagogy Instructor

- 2017 Diversity Outreach Coordinator, Philosophy, University of Chicago.
In this position I acted as a liaison for undergraduate women and students from underrepresented groups, provided diversity pedagogy training for graduate students, and worked with the department chair (Gabriel Lear) and the director of undergraduate studies (Anton Ford) on climate issues in the department.
- 2016 Creating an Enabling Classroom. Chicago Center for Teaching, University of Chicago.
Along with other members of the Gender and Academia Working Group, I designed a pedagogy training workshop for the Chicago Center for Teaching, which is now held twice annually. The aim of the workshop is to help instructors create an inclusive classroom.
- 2015 Diversity in the Classroom. Philosophy Pedagogy Program, University of Chicago.

ACADEMIC SERVICE

- 2018 Senior Thesis Advisor. Yale University, Philosophy Department.
- 2018 Sophomore Academic Advisor. Yale University, Philosophy Department.
- 2018 Article Referee: *European Journal of Philosophy; Analysis; Philosophical Quarterly*.
- 2017 Diversity Outreach Coordinator. University of Chicago.
- 2016 Wittgenstein Workshop Coordinator.
- 2016 Women in Philosophy Organizer. Philosophy, University of Chicago.
- 2015 Contemporary European Philosophy Workshop Coordinator.
- Elucidations Podcast, Interviewer. University of Chicago.
Bryce Huebner (Georgetown): Race and Cognition
Stephen Engstrom (Pittsburgh): Kant's Categorical Imperative
Christel Fricke (Oslo): Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments
Rafeeq Hasan (Amherst): Rousseau on Freedom and Happiness

REFERENCES

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Lecturer in Philosophy

LONG DISSERTATION ABSTRACT: *Self-Opacity, Human Agency, and Ethics*.

I argue that self-opacity—not knowing why we do what we do—is actually an essential feature of human agency, and that can contribute productively to human life. While it is no doubt true that, in simple cases, we tend to know what we are doing and why, in ethically complex circumstances where our values and self-conceptions are at stake, we are often not clear why we do what we do, we do not understand our motivations, and our aims are opaque. This often-disorienting experience is familiar from ordinary life and is a frequent theme of literature and film, yet it has not received adequate philosophical attention. In contemporary analytic moral philosophy, self-opacity tends to be treated cursorily, as a contingent failure of agency and as an obstacle to ethics. But I argue not only that self-opacity is ineradicable, but can actually contribute productively to our ethical lives. The dissertation has three parts: the first is critical of available conceptions of agency and moral psychology, the second part offers an account of how to understand self-opacity’s place in human life, and in the third part I analyze the productive role that self-opacity plays in ethical life. Specifically, I argue that cultivating a non-defensive relationship to self-opacity is essential to moral change and critique, which transform our sense of ourselves and our ethical relationships with others.

In Part One I critique two broad approaches to agency and self-opacity. The Deliberative Endorsement view (Korsgaard, Frankfurt, Moran, Wallace) emphasizes the authority of the first-person, deliberative perspective, where this involves privileging deliberation and choice as revelatory of the structure of agency, and giving special normative weight to the attitudes and actions that the agent herself endorses. But I argue this conception is idealized, overly volitional, and insufficiently critical, and thus reduces self-opacity to a contingent agential failure. The second approach (especially Arpaly, but also Doris) maintains that self-opacity is the rule for human life and that because of this, the agent’s first-person perspective and self-understanding should be seen as normatively insignificant for understanding agency. But, I argue that insofar as self-opacity is relevant to ethics and practical life, it must be understood, not as a mere fact about us that we can know theoretically, but as a problem we encounter first- and second-personally. I conclude Part One with the claim that we need to conceive of self-opacity *from* the practical perspective, yet in such a way that our understanding of that perspective and its normative significance is transformed in light of its opacity.

In Part Two I engage the positive work of showing that self-opacity is essential to human agency, thanks to two mutually informing aspects of human life: the fact that human life is *bodily* and the fact that human life is *social*. These are the main sites of our dependency and vulnerability, and constitute those aspects of our practical lives that resist ordinary comprehension from the first-person perspective, and yet would not be adequately understood if they were approached theoretically. In Chapter Three I examine John McDowell analysis of human agency as second natural. McDowell emphasizes that our rationality transforms our animality in order to avoid a dualist conception of human nature as essentially split. I analyze Freud’s concept of drive through McDowell’s framework in order to argue for a conception of human nature as conflictual, even if not metaphysically split. The concept of drive contributes to our understanding of how our creaturely being is bound up with and transformed by rationality and normativity, and yet in such a way that this relationship retains an agonistic dimension. I show that this renders our relationship to norms partially opaque but also thereby emphatically significant.

In Chapter Four I turn to the sociality of agency, the fact that that our actions and utterances are meaningful only in the context of social practices and depend on their being recognized as meaningful by others. I analyze Korsgaard’s brief discussion of dependency in *Self-Constitution* where she argues our agency is dependent on and *thereby* “threatened” by the social world, taken “hostage” by it, as she puts it. Appreciating why Korsgaard’s picture of agency cannot accommodate our

dependency is instructive for what any appropriately realistic conception of agency must look like. In brief, we must integrate dependency into agency and understand it as essentially double-sided: while it is in virtue of our dependency that our agency can be threatened, the fact that our agency and actions acquire significances that outstrip our intentions and self-understandings is what imbues those actions with practical reality. I argue that this dependent dimension of agency shows up reflexively in the form of self-opacity.

Finally in Part Three I argue that while it is tempting to regard self-opacity as something regrettable that we would rather do without, practical self-opacity can in fact contribute productively to ethical life. I explore some of the ways self-opacity shows up, not as a state of brute ignorance (of which we are wholly unaware) but by disrupting our ordinary self-understandings and ways of going on, where such disruption plays a role in moral change and self-critique. These encounters challenge our self-conception and make our non-self-sufficiency practically perspicuous. I argue that in these experiences, the *form* of the experience and its *content* are internally related: *what* we learn (that we are not self-sufficient) is inextricable from *how* we learn (through unwilled disruption). The value of these encounters does not hinge on moving from ignorance to knowledge—after all, as finite knowers, there are many things we do not know or must learn—but involves cultivating a non-defensive, ethically significant form of self-relation that not only tolerates self-opacity but can recognize its role in moral growth.