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Introduction

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Popular culture has always been an elusive concept to define, not least because, as John Storey has argued, it derives its meaning contrastively from a comparison with another term which is either explicitly named or implicitly invoked, for example high culture, dominant culture, mass culture or folk culture (2009: 1). Depending on the “absent other” to which it is contrasted, popular culture thus takes on different connotations. In his groundbreaking interrogation of some key cultural and political concepts, Raymond Williams specifically identified four different meanings of the term “popular”, which can shed light on the various attitudes toward popular culture in society: “well liked by many people”, “inferior kinds of work”, “works deliberately setting out to win favour with the people” and “culture actually made by the people for themselves” (quoted in Storey 2009: 5). The first meaning can be read rather neutrally, based upon a quantitative definition of the popular as something garnering support from, or enjoyed by, a significant number of people. The second and third meanings have perhaps been the most common ways in which “popular”, when affixed to “culture”, has been understood, not least within academia. Popular culture in this case derives its meaning from its failure to meet the standards of high, or highbrow, culture, which is alone seen as worthy of critical attention. Popular culture can alternatively take on connotations of being demagogic, manipulative, mediocre (lacking both aesthetic and intellectual complexity) or passivity-inducing—or all of the above. The last meaning, however, inscribes popular culture with a more progressive and even subversive potential, both at the level of production—democratizing the cultural—and at the level of reception, promoting a more active stance from its audience, rather than mere passive acquiescence.

Another difficulty involved in defining popular culture lies in the fact that “culture”, the other term in the pair, also presents us with significant difficulties since, if we are to trust Williams once again, “it is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”

(1976: 76). In different contexts and used by different people, culture can for example alternately denote a very restricted body of intellectual and artistic work—in which case "high culture" becomes synonymous with culture as a whole—or it can much more inclusively stand for "the actual ground terrain of practices, representations, languages, and customs of any specific historical society" (Freccero 1999: 13).

What the development of cultural and popular cultural studies in the 1950s and 1960s made apparent was the privileging of a very restricted meaning of culture that was advanced and reproduced within academia. The resistance to engaging seriously with popular culture that has long characterized academia, as well as its insistence on the maintenance of clear analytical boundaries delineating popular and high culture, have also been shown as symptomatic of widespread exclusionary practices and as deeply revealing both of an ahistorical perspective[1] and of a none too subtle class bias (Storey 2009: 6-8).

It is interesting to note in this respect the concomitant development of cultural studies as a field of enquiry and the arrival of "a new class of student (the scholarship boy or gifted working-class pupil)" entering the walls of academia (Halberstam 68). Through the different questions posed by these students, new methods and theoretical approaches emerged and helped both to demystify culture and knowledge and to democratize academic research. Importantly, this also helped to break down the artificial boundaries between different academic disciplines, which were shown not to be given but historically specific. Thus, the interdisciplinary nature of popular culture led to a much more holistic approach within the field. Popular cultural studies did not become interdisciplinary for its own sake, however, as a case of "playing with

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[1] The characterisation of writers such as Shakespeare and Dickens as Canonical shows the tenuous and historically specific nature of the boundary between popular and high culture, since their work certainly represented the popular culture of their day. In his article on the language of popular culture in this issue, Joe Trotta also points to the contradiction in the arguments of prescriptive linguists who lament the lowering of linguistic standards through popular culture, while ignoring, for instance, Shakespeare's highly playful and unorthodox use of language.

categories", but because new questions demanded new ways of approach that went beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries (Halberstam 68-69).

In the U.S. context, Ray Browne (1922-2009) played a pioneering role in developing the field of popular culture studies, founding for example the *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1967 and the Popular Culture Association in 1970—two institutions that helped rally and organize scholars in the field, as well as give the study of popular culture academic legitimacy. In his defense of popular culture, Browne made large claims for its significance, both in our private lives, but also in relation to society as a whole:

> Popular culture is the way of life in which and by which most people in any society live. […] It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, and diversions; it is our heroes, icons, rituals, everyday actions, psychology, and religion—our total life pictures. It is the way of life we inherit, practice, modify as we please and then pass on to our descendants. It is what we do while we are awake and how we do it; it is the dreams we dream while asleep… (Browne 2001: 1-2)

Although somewhat rhetorical, Browne's definition nevertheless points to the way popular culture structures and organizes the everyday experience of people. In this respect what appears most urgent is not to extricate the essence of popular culture—which for some might be too inclusive to really be useful (Storey 2009: 1)—but to investigate the ways in which it is lived and in which it functions. It is in Raymond Williams' phrase the "structures of feelings" that form the ideological cement of any given society, the ways in which thoughts and feelings intimately intermingle ("thought as felt and feeling as thought" (Williams 1977: 132)). Far from being just a marginal or superficial cultural phenomenon, popular culture remains in fact at the very heart of how we live our lives and how we perceive society around us, how we think and feel about it. As Hall argues, it is a site where "collective social understandings are created" (quoted in Storey 2009: 4) and—as a consequence—a particularly salient locus for a critical struggle over signification.

As a result, it is the signifying practices of popular cultural texts and their import in the everyday that has more and more become the concern of researchers. Not, as Browne puts it, so that such knowledge "be learned, canonized and worshipped as the end in itself" but "in order better to develop the present and the future" (1989: 1). In other words, the possibilities for social change have always constituted a significant aspect of cultural studies (Freccero 1999: 13).[2]

Methodologically, much of the work of popular culture analysts revolves around issues of cultural representation since, in the words of Storey, "it is only in practices of representation that the world can be made to mean". Representational practices thus matter to the cultural studies critic because, contrary to common belief, representations do not describe but in fact actively *construct* reality (Storey 2003: x). What reality (in all its possible contradictions) specific popular cultural texts construct becomes therefore the prime focus of critical attention.

This present issue of the *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, dedicated to the theme of popular culture, hopefully reflects this broad spectrum of approaches within the field. The issue is also deliberately eclectic in subject-matter in order to convey the inclusive meaning of "culture" within popular culture. The type of material covered by the different articles ranges for instance from literary works, advertising, film and television to charity concerts and campaigns. Also, alongside more Canonical fiction, other written sources, not usually critically explored, such as cookbooks, are examined in the collection. Thus, the main ambition of this special issue has been both to highlight the rich scope of popular cultural studies within academia and to make this field of research more readily available to readers of the journal.

Recurrent in most of the articles are questions about the link between popular culture, power and social change. This is of course characteristic of the field of cultural studies itself. It is also partly due to one of the practical starting points for this issue, which grew out of the Popular Culture and Activism Panels at the Mid-Atlantic Popular and American Culture Association Conference held in Boston in 2009.[3] The contributions articulate therefore what Stuart Hall has called the "double stake in popular culture, the double-movement of *containment* and *resistance*" (2006: 478, my emphasis). While highlighting practices of

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[2] See Freccero for a discussion of the background to and significance of the field of cultural studies and popular culture (13-23).

[3] Some of the contributors to this issue—Louise Davis, Amy Reddinger, Laurie Selleck, Michelle Stack and Carolyn Veldstra—originally presented their research in the panels I chaired at that conference.

exclusion and power within their specific areas of focus, the authors also explore the possibilities cultural studies open up for resistance, subversion and resignification.

This potential ideological impact is something that demands our critical attention. Moreover, support for this popular cultural strategy has sometimes come from unexpected corners; T.S. Eliot argued, for example, albeit reluctantly:

> But what people commonly assume, I suspect, is that we gain this experience of other men's views of life only by "improving reading." This, it is supposed, is a reward we get by applying ourselves to Shakespeare, and Dante, and Goethe, and Emerson, and Carlyle, and dozens of other respectable writers. The rest of our reading for amusement is merely killing time. But I incline to come to the alarming conclusion that it is just the literature that we read for "amusement" or "purely for pleasure" that *may have the greatest and least suspected influence upon us*. It is the literature that we read with the least effort that can have the easiest and most insidious influence upon us. Hence it is that the influence of popular novelists, and of popular plays of contemporary life, *requires to be scrutinized most closely*.
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> (quoted in Sheridan 1937: 172-173, my emphasis)

In her article, "Robert Louis Stevenson and Popular Culture", Linda Dryden heeds this call to "scrutinize" popular literature, but with more enthusiasm and respect for the value of what is defined as popular. Dryden chooses to focus her analysis on Stevenson precisely because of the liminal position he occupies as an author, who both has been Canonized for his literary talent and has enjoyed tremendous popularity (i.e, is "well-liked by many people"). Dryden tries to elucidate the reason for his success and in so doing also interrogates the barrier between so-called highbrow and lowbrow culture, a division usually considered airtight, despite much evidence to the contrary.

In "Beyond the Abyss: Jack London and the Working Class", Ronald Paul similarly focuses on an author whose work crosses the boundaries between popular readership and academic recognition. Not only London's writing, but also London himself, inhabited an uneasy social position, not least due to his troubled personal experience of class migration. With this background in mind, Paul looks at the most famous of London's journalistic exposés, *The People of the Abyss*, in order to explore the contradictory attitudes to the working class pervading it. Thus, questions of genre become central, as Paul argues that while London certainly replicates some of the sensationalist clichés prevalent in such journalistic texts at the time, another, competing, and largely critically unexplored, reality emerges from the narrative, where it allows for the voice of individual working-class people to be heard.

Starting with the language controversy involving Winston's 1954 advertising campaign—"Winston tastes good *like* a cigarette should"—Joe Trotta's article "Whose Rules Rule?: Grammar Controversies, Popular Culture and the Fear of English from Below" looks into the underlying issues behind purist attitudes to language. The moral panic about what is seen to be the incorrect use of either comparatives or conjunctions reveals, Trotta argues, deeper concerns pertaining to the maintenance and subversion of social hierarchies. By examining several such controversies sparked by popular cultural texts, Trotta makes a case both for a positive re-evaluation of the language of popular culture and for the need for academia to seriously engage with it.

Cookbooks form the focus of Amy Reddinger's analysis of postwar Hawaiian politics, "Eating 'Local': The Politics of Post-Statehood Hawaiian Cookbooks". While for most of us cookbooks are often appreciated mainly for their instrumental function, Reddinger shows how embedded such texts are within their social context and explores what cultural and political work they perform. Using Mary Louise Pratt's concept of *autoethnography*, Reddinger argues that the two cookbooks at the core of her discussion—*Hawaiian Cuisine* (1963) published by the Hawai'i State Society, and *The Hawaii Cookbook and Backyard Luau* (1964) by Elizabeth Ahn Toupin—actively contest the often simplistic and sometimes exploitative representations of Hawai'i and of the Hawaiian people ubiquitous in mainstream (and mainland) U.S. culture of the 1960s. Reddinger demonstrates how the weaving of food recipes and history in the two cookbooks construct and promote alternative understandings of Hawaiian society.

The two following articles, Louise Davis' "Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices From Live Aid to Product Red" and Laurie Selleck's "Pretty in Pink: The Susan G. Komen Network and the Branding of the Breast Cancer Cause", both examine the phenomenon of charity and highlight in particular the uneasy relationship between form and content in charity campaigns. While most people would agree about the aims advanced by those organizations Davis and Selleck analyze—the goal to make poverty history, successively promoted by Band Aid, Live Aid, Live 8 and Product RED, and the fight against breast cancer taken up by the Komen network respectively—the strategies these groups utilize raise serious questions regarding the relationship between ends and means. In the case of the campaigns to end poverty and hunger in Africa, sparked by images of the 1980s famine in Ethiopia, Davis interrogates for example the notion of one-worldism promoted by the "texts" produced through the campaigns and how this relates to the re-inscription of the West's central role both in representing and saving a helpless Africa. In her discussion of the Susan G. Komen network and their remarkably successful pink ribbon campaigns, Selleck also problematizes the network's alliance with and reliance on corporate sponsors who derive profits from people's charitable inclination. In this context, Selleck investigates accusations against the network for engaging in "slacktivist" tactics and "pinkwashing". Both Davis and Selleck do not, however, oversimplify their analysis, but open up for different readings and possibilities within these charity discourses.

Carolyn Veldstra's article, "Patron Saint of Lost Causes, Live on the BBC: The Yes Men, Humour and the Possibility of Politics" inquires into the role humor can claim in politics. Veldstra focuses her analysis on the hoax—or hijink as they themselves prefer to refer to it—carried out by the Yes Men, a British activist group, on the twentieth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster. Using theorists such as Slavoj Žižek and Peter Sloterdijk—in particular the latter's concept of kynicism—Veldstra dissects the Yes Men's political intervention in order to evaluate the potential for social change that strategies involving humor may carry in a mediatic world such as ours already so saturated with satire.

Imelda Whelehan's "Remaking Feminism: Or Why Is Postfeminism So Boring?" voices the ennui felt by a feminist critic faced with the flood of so-called postfeminist productions pervading both our cinema and television screens. Looking more specifically at recent film adaptations of feministic texts—*The Women*, *The Stepford Wives* and *Sex and the City: The Movie*—Whelehan explores how the concomitant invocation and erasure of a feminist discourse manifests itself through endless repetition and how collective feminist politics is further and further deferred through multiple adaptation. Instead of countering with a similarly predictable feminist critique of these texts, Whelehan provides an unexpected and much more challenging reading of such popular narratives through their relation to the politics of feminism.

My own article focuses on the representation of designated adoption and what this signifies in terms of class and gender in three television series—*Sex and the City*, *Friends* and *Desperate Housewives*. I look more specifically at the ways in which the plots narratively and visually construct a division between two categories of women defined by their class background and ask what ideological implications this has for the reproduction of social hierarchies. The title of my article, "More for the Fit: Gender and Class in the Representation of Designated Adoption in a Selection of U.S. Television Series" in particular suggests a dark parallel between these modern representations of adoption and the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century.

The final article of this issue, Michelle Stack's "'In movies, someone always has to be the bad guy': Mediatized Subjectivities and Youth Media Production", brings the theoretical question of the tensions between popular culture and politics to the practical field of pedagogics and media education. Through an analysis of student media production and interviews, Stack's ethnographic study of a Canadian high school probes into the issue of how Canadian youth come to construct their subjectivities in dialogue with popular culture and what subject positions seem to be available to them. Stack also ponders over the role of media educators and the possibilities of moving away from the reproduction of stereotypes and towards more critical awareness.

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Robert Louis Stevenson and Popular Culture

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Within the traditional canon of English Literature Robert Louis Stevenson's position has oscillated between that of celebrated man of letters and popular writer of boys' adventure fiction. In his lifetime he was highly regarded as an essayist of considerable talent, a man who was seen as an equal to Henry James and whose literary reputation was jealously guarded by friends like W. E. Henley and Sidney Colvin. In the twentieth century, however, this reputation became subordinated to his popularity as the writer of the best sellers *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886). In the last fifteen or so years, however, Stevenson has begun to receive more serious academic attention, with his later novels and stories being recognised as contributing to genres beyond the adventure romance. It has thus become a pressing task to reassess Stevenson's place within the literature of the last two hundred years because this allows us to recognise the range of genres that influenced his fiction, and how, in turn, his work influenced future generations of writers. This essay will thus explore how Stevenson's work endures through re-tellings, re-imaginings and adaptations in contemporary popular culture.

Recent works like *Stevenson and Conrad: Writers of Transition* seek to reposition Stevenson alongside his near contemporaries, and argue that he was a writer who deserves more serious attention.[1] Such works recognise the proximity between Stevenson and Joseph Conrad, acknowledging the debt that Conrad owed to the earlier writer, and allowing Stevenson to take a deserved place alongside the celebrated writers of the late nineteenth-century. Frederic Jameson claims that Conrad "floats uncertainly somewhere between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson" (Jameson 1981: 206), a claim that elevates Conrad and

[1] See Linda Dryden, Stephen Arata and Eric Massie, eds., *Stevenson and Conrad: Writers of Transition*.

perpetuates the common misconception of Stevenson as a writer of boys' adventure fiction: he is, of course, much more than this. Yet, at the same time we cannot and should not ignore Stevenson's place within popular culture. His reputation thus poses a conundrum: Stevenson is popular, with mass appeal, but he is also a serious writer whose work both transcends the popular and embraces it.

The following discussion, therefore considers the impact on popular culture of two of Stevenson's works, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Treasure Island*. While these works are famous in their own right, there has been no detailed examination of how and why they continue to exert such a compelling influence over popular cultural products. This paper will thus begin the work of establishing Stevenson not only as a writer of immensely popular fictions, but as a writer whose narratives transcend historical specificity and speak to readers and audiences today as clearly as they did over one hundred years ago. In examining Stevenson's contribution to the popular imagination, then, what emerges is a sense of the immediacy of his prose and of a unique imagination that could produce memorable characters and enduring narratives that are signally appropriate for adaptation into new and emerging cultural forms and products.

Strange case: the cultural endurance of Jekyll and Hyde

Joseph Conrad would never be regarded as a writer of popular fiction, and yet this Polish émigré-turned-English-gentleman has had a huge influence on popular culture. For example, references to *Heart of Darkness* have become a commonplace in popular culture from newspaper headlines to the internet, from *Star Trek* to *The Simpsons* (Dryden 2002). Such pervasiveness is evidence of the symbiotic relationship between so-called "high and low culture." Popular culture relies on "high" art for the purposes of satire, but also for more serious social commentary: "high" art relies on popular culture for its very subject matter. If this were not the case, some of the great works of modernism would never have been written: *Ulysses*, a text that embraces popular culture such as newspapers and music halls, is a case in point. It is postmodernism's eradication of cultural boundaries that has enabled arguments about the role of popular culture in literature and allowed for a re-evaluation of the very notion of literary worth. Robert Louis

Stevenson's legacy thus benefits from the advent of postmodernism and, as a result, Jameson's reductive assessment of his place in the tradition of English literature is open to significant challenges.

In a world obsessed with advertising and image, Stevenson is a potent international brand. The image of the velvet coated, lanky Scotsman is as recognisable around the world as that of Dickens, and the reasons for this are two-fold: *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Treasure Island*. Probably the most influential of these two works though is *Jekyll and Hyde*, which is to Stevenson's reputation what *Heart of Darkness* is to Conrad. This is a novella that captured the popular imagination upon its publication and is so well-known today that, in the Western world at least, it cannot be read for the first time with any genuine anticipation as to the key to the riddle of its narrative—we all know Hyde's provenance, we all know how the story ends. Like Conrad's novella, *Jekyll and Hyde* has become a constant cultural referent. It is used to describe aberrant behaviour whenever an apparently respectable individual is found to have been leading a double life. However, the ubiquity of the phrase "leading a Jekyll and Hyde existence" may well be indirectly ascribed to the film adaptations of the story and not to the novella itself. It is probably the case that more people have seen a film version than have actually read the novella. The transformation of the urbane Jekyll into the monstrous Hyde is particularly suited to the medium of film because of its startling visual impact, and it is this bizarre event, filmed using ever more sophisticated special effects, that captures the popular imagination and propels this extraordinary tale into new centuries with renewed relevance and immediacy.

When he wrote *Jekyll and Hyde Adapted: Dramatizations of Cultural Anxiety* in 1996, Brian A. Rose estimated that around 80 films had been based on or influenced by Stevenson's classic, including the *Nutty Professor* series of comedy films. If we take into account television programmes based on the novella and more recent film adaptations and derivative works, then that number will have grown substantially in the intervening years. Only a handful of authors can be said to have been so influential on popular culture, and cinema in particular. Apart from Shakespeare and Dickens, one would cite Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Conrad, and Conan Doyle as having written texts that have transcended the boundaries of literature and infiltrated our popular culture at all levels: from the covers of cereal packets to television dramas, the works of these authors are constantly being referenced in contemporary popular culture.[2] Yet Stevenson occupies a liminal position in such popular company: to borrow from Jameson, Stevenson seems to "float uncertainly somewhere" between Conrad and Conan Doyle, denied the lionization and reputation for experimentalism enjoyed by Conrad, yet seeming to be more versatile, more a "man of letters," than Conan Doyle.

Another Edinburgh Scotsman, Conan Doyle, invented Sherlock Holmes and shot to international fame, leaving a legacy in detective fiction that has shaped the genre to the present day. What Conan Doyle created was a formula and a stereotype that continue to influence the notion of the detective as having a darker, brooding or philosophical inner consciousness in conflict with his (it is usually a male) clear-cut mission to defeat crime. This conception of the inherent duality of the detective threads through crime fiction from Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe to Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus, and reminds us that it was *Jekyll and Hyde*, perhaps more than any other text before it, that popularized the notion of a darker self lurking within the seemingly respectable citizen.[3]

With *Jekyll and Hyde*, however, Stevenson goes beyond formula and stereotype, transcending genre by probing the psyche and producing a narrative of such implied horror that readers are both fascinated and repelled. So obsessed is the popular imagination with this extraordinary story that writers are compelled to revisit it in television dramas, graphic novels, cartoon strips, films, theatre productions and all sorts of images of duality in popular culture. Like Frankenstein's monster, Mr Hyde has come to represent the darker side of the human psyche in the popular consciousness: he was made instantly recognisable as the leering simian creature by Rouben Mamoulian in his 1931 film adaptation, and it is

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[2] A recent drama on British television, "Lost in Austen," is a case in point, as is the Count on "Sesame Street," an obvious reference to Dracula. In the case of Stevenson one obvious example is the British children's television programme "Juliet Jekyll and Harriet Hyde," which ran from 1995-98.

[3] Rankin himself has often stated in the media that his work, and particularly his portrayal of Edinburgh, is strongly influenced by his reading of Stevenson.

Mamoulian's conception of Hyde that remains the most powerful and frequently imitated visual representation of Jekyll's doppelgänger.

However, the influence of *Jekyll and Hyde* stretches far beyond filmic representations: it has been fundamental in establishing doppelgänger narratives in any number of genres, not least modern comic book heroes and their inheritors in such television programmes as the recent *Heroes* series.[4] If Mary Shelley invented the mad professor/scientist, Stevenson combined the prototype with a psychological horror in the form of a transformative duality and transported the action to the heart of London. While Frankenstein's monster murdered through childlike emotional need and destructive vengeance, Stevenson gave Hyde no apparent motive and heightened the horror—to kill or maim for the sheer pleasure of it, to combine such mindless brutality, such gleeful sadism with a virile ugliness that is repellent and fascinating at the same time is truly a monumental achievement.[5]

The story is so compelling that creative artists have been unable to resist the impulse to repeat Stevenson's vision with seemingly infinite variations over the ensuing decades. It could well be argued that the dual lives of superheroes like Superman, Batman, and Spiderman owe a great deal to Stevenson's vision of respectable citizens leading double lives. While Superman and Spiderman turn this duality into a force for good, the Batman explores the darker side of human nature by engaging in vigilante activities, a development of Stevenson's vision. Even nearer the mark is the Incredible Hulk, the monstrous result of an experiment gone wrong. As a scientist who mutates into an ugly beast with primal instincts, Bruce Banner and his alter-ego, the Hulk, are clearly comic book descendants of Jekyll/Hyde and Frankenstein.

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[4] In this programme the actor Ali Larter plays Niki Sanders, a "hero" who has a malevolent doppelgänger named Jessica. The character is evidently based on Jekyll and Hyde.

[5] It should also be noted, however, that there are numerous readings of the novel that seek to ascribe motivation to Hyde, in particular Freudian readings that explore the father/son relationship in ways that echo *Frankenstein*. I am not disputing these readings, but merely asserting that the actual narrative ascribes no motivation—that is part of its fascination.

The story enters popular culture at the level of myth and thus becomes accessible to any number of transmutations in itself. So Jekyll, in the film versions, acquires a wife or fiancée; in the nineteenth century suggestions of Hyde's criminal activities became influenced by the Ripper Murders, and his early filmic character thus became a sexual predator who murdered prostitutes. These plot manipulations reflect the film industry's need to inject glamour (a central female character), and salacious content (murdered prostitutes) into a narrative from which women are largely absent and where the nature of the crime is deliberately elided. The novella is determinedly elliptical about the exact appearance of Hyde, and thus filmmakers, starting with Mamoulian, take their cue from the term "troglodytic," turning Hyde into a hairy monkey man, with long arms, simian features and superhuman agility—much more of a cinematic feast tailored for a visual medium than the textual original. The psychological depths of the original are stripped away and the narrative becomes an ideal vehicle for the sensation and horror that draws audiences in a more secular age where the thirst for immediate gratification is sated with the gruesome horror of Hyde's appearance and his sexual murders.

Where Stevenson's textual narrative is elusive and implicit, the popular form of the visual narrative, from film to television to graphic novels to comic books, revels in explicit images of violence and horror. In short, the very simplicity of the story, coupled with its refusal to be precise, to articulate what really happens, makes it the ideal narrative for contemporary adaptation dealing with contemporary issues and contemporary media appetites. So, in the recent British television programme *Jekyll*, the hero is a descendant of the original doctor, now called Jackman, whose ability to transform into a super-being brings him to the attention of weapons manufacturers and a game of cat-and-mouse ensues. Jackman's "Hyde" is still an alter-ego, but he is no longer a sadistic killer. Rather, the doppelgänger exists to protect Jackman's family. Even Stevenson himself features in a flashback sequence, and Jekyll becomes a real historical figure, rather than the extraordinary product of an extraordinary imagination. In this way, the story has transcended the confines of the page and become a cultural myth, open to any number of reinterpretations. Just like its protagonist, *Jekyll and Hyde* is poised to transform, to transmutate, to adapt, for as long as its very human story remains true to experience.

A new type of villain: Treasure Island*, Long John Silver and the pirate's lexicon*

Stevenson's other popular cultural reputation is that of boys' adventure story writer: much of his enduring appeal is a result of the fact that *Treasure Island* continues to be read by generations of young boys. Although not quite as prolific in terms of popular adaptation as *Jekyll and Hyde*, there have been over fifty movies and television productions based on the novel. As a hallmark of its entry into mainstream popular culture, Walt Disney made the most iconic of these versions in 1950, adding "Arrrgh, Jim lad" to the lexicon of *Treasure Island*, and thus providing a phrase that has become laden with meaning associated with pirate narratives in popular culture, forever associated with Stevenson's novel even though Long John Silver never utters the words in print.

It could be argued that *Treasure Island* established the boy's adventure story in the same way that *The Time Machine* marked the emergence of the genre of science fiction. Notwithstanding their predecessors in these popular genres, Stevenson and Wells are regarded as pivotal when it comes to adventure narratives and science fiction respectively. Indeed, Stevenson was unwittingly responsible for kick-starting the career of one of the most famous purveyors of adventure fiction, H. Rider Haggard, as Peter Keating notes:

> In 1884 [Rider Haggard] was the author of two unsuccessful novels. Hearing the recently published *Treasure Island* highly praised, he spoke slightingly of it and was challenged by his brother to 'write anything half so good.' He responded with *King Solomon's Mines*, which shared with *Treasure Island*, a string of exciting adventures and mythic appeal. (Keating 1989: 344)

On publication *King Solomon's Mines* outsold Stevenson's novel nearly three times over: thirty-one thousand copies in one year compared to *Treasure Island*'s twelve thousand (Keating 1989: 16). Haggard's novel provided the template for a particular kind of boys' adventure narrative involving weird and vaguely supernatural occurrences in Africa and the East, notably influencing the *Indiana Jones* franchise: in its turn, *Treasure Island* has become a byword for piratical adventure on the high seas.

Swashbuckling pirates and enigmatic anti-heroes can be traced back at least to Long John Silver. *Treasure Island* is thus the second of Stevenson's works to establish his credentials with regards to popular culture, though of course it occurs earlier than *Jekyll and Hyde* in the Stevenson canon. Its influence though, unlike *Jekyll and Hyde*, works at the level of genre. Predecessors in the boys' adventure story genre are characterised by Marryat's *Masterman Ready* or R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, but these are rambling, episodic novels, that are naïve and superficial. Boys' adventure fiction usually reinforces traditional values, offering nothing challenging or subversive in the way of plot or characters. They are simplistic and morally didactic. *Treasure Island* on the other hand, is rich and complex with a tightly woven narrative structure and well-defined, sometimes compromised, protagonists whose motivations can be questionable. At its heart is the pirate tale, and it is around this that the action revolves, raising questions of divided loyalties, the growth into manhood, the nature of good and evil, and issues of motivation and greed.

Treasure Island problematises the notion of the hero and offers us a colourful version of the villain in Long John Silver. Silver is a slippery, charismatic character who shifts loyalties seamlessly between the mutineers and the so-called "honest" crew. He is self-seeking, eloquent of speech, duplicitous and capable of callous murder. Yet Silver is also curiously attractive, exotic, and at bottom, loyal to those who protect him (until, that is, he spies the opportunity for escape). He can be persuasive, with an oily tongue, and knows how to manipulate those he cajoles into co-operating with him. At the same time he is not overly greedy and only takes a few hundred guineas from the surviving adventurers when he could easily, most likely, have taken more.

Perhaps Silver finds a counterpart in Magwich in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, but rarely, if ever, had such a villain graced the pages of adventure fiction and captured the uneasy admiration of the boy-hero. Silver is unusual in the boys' adventure genre in that his villainy is mixed with a peculiar kind of charisma. Furthermore, closure in such fiction always entails retribution and usually death for the villain. Silver receives no such fate: despite the deaths for which he is responsible, he absconds in the end, a free, and reasonably wealthy man to reunite with his wife, in many ways prefiguring Conrad's *Secret Sharer*. Fenimore Cooper's Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans* or Conrad's Gentleman

Brown in *Lord Jim* are villains conceived firmly in the adventure mode, but they are characters of unalloyed evil.[6] In fact Stevenson was inspired in *Treasure Island* by his reading of works by Daniel Defoe, Edgar Allan Poe, and Washington Irving, declaring of Irving's "Wolfert Webber": "It is my debt to Washington Irving that exercises my conscience, and justly so, for I believe plagiarism was rarely carried farther' (*Treasure Island* 1999: 194).

In *Jekyll and Hyde* Stevenson took the doppelgänger tradition of the likes of Edgar Allan Poe and James Hogg and imbued it with a modern sensibility that enables it to function as a cipher for cultural anxieties in any age. With Long John Silver he had done something different: Silver's character draws on the stereotypic tropes of a pirate fiction that had its Golden Age in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but he also represents a new type of anti-hero for modern times. Stevenson injects into the adventure of pirate narratives a moral dubiety that compromises the ostensible heroes, Jim, Squire Trelawney and Doctor Livesey, leaving Silver in an ambiguous, liminal space between villain and hero. So enigmatic is Long John Silver that his influences stretch through J. M. Barrie's Captain Hook, who added an eye patch and a genuine wooden leg to Stevenson's conception, to pantomime characters and certainly into the creation of Captain Jack Sparrow in the recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* trilogy. Sparrow inherits much of Silver's ambiguity and turns Silver's dangerous playfulness into knockabout farce.

Along with its colourful characters, *Treasure Island* has provided us with an entire, enigmatic vocabulary for the pirate adventure genre: "pieces of eight," "dead man's chest," "yo ho ho and a bottle of rum," and that trademark phrase of Silver's "shiver my timbers." Combine the unique characters and pirate vocabulary with the famous treasure map that features as the Frontispiece to the novel and it is apparent that Stevenson created a uniquely compelling formula for pirate stories. Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson's stepson, in his "Note" to the Tusitala

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[6] *Lord Jim* contains elements of Stevenson's novel, even down to the name of the hero, Jim, but this is no boys' story: it is a novel that sets out to subvert the romance/adventure mode. See for more discussion, Linda Dryden, 1999. *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

edition of *Treasure Island* in 1923, outlines some of the further details in the novel that have subsequently contributed to its popular fame. Lloyd had been painting the original map when Stevenson entered the room:

> Stevenson came in as I was finishing it, and with his affectionate interest in everything I was doing, leaned over my shoulder, and was soon elaborating the map, and naming it. I shall never forget the thrill of Skeleton Island, Spy-Glass Hill, nor the heart-stirring climax of the three red crosses! And the greater climax still when he wrote down the words 'Treasure Island' at the top right-hand corner! And he seemed to know so much about it too – the pirates, the buried treasure, the man who had been marooned on the island. 'Oh, for a story about it,' I exclaimed in a heaven of enchantment […]. (*Treasure Island* 1923: xviii)

Thus one of the most famous and influential of all children's stories had its genesis in a rudimentary map painted by a young boy. That this initial map was lost, perhaps discarded by a careless publisher, means we will never see the artefact that precipitated such a time-honoured classic of children's literature, but its emblems have remained lodged in the popular consciousness for over one hundred years.

These emblems that Stevenson added to Lloyd's prototype map have become the symbols of pirate fiction ever since: the treasure map where X marks the spot, the one-legged pirate with a parrot on his shoulder, chests full of treasure, the black spot, and the pirates' code of behaviour. What Stevenson managed to do was to create simple, but instantly recognisable images that are ideal for popular consumption and reproduction: they are playfully sinister, immediately recognised, but containing a wealth of strange juxtapositions that are vaguely suggestive of the uncanny or the exotic. It may be that Stevenson was not the first to coin some of these phrases or to invoke these images. Indeed, popular culture, like all products of the imagination, rarely appears as the sudden, unique inspiration of one person: most imaginative ideas have their roots in previous incarnations of culture, are dependent upon lore or cultural practice. Shakespeare takes the fairy, previously a malign creature, and endows it, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with a magical mysticism and ethereal beauty that has come to define our perception of the fairy. Likewise, Stevenson amasses language and imagery that coalesce and fix around the romantic, exotic image of the roguish pirate, and thus creates a staple figure for popular culture.

As a result, *Treasure Island* is referenced whenever pirates are mentioned in contemporary culture: even the cover page of the *Times*

Higher Education on June 4, 2009, featured the byline, "Long John Silver's lessons for Adam Smith," even though the article this refers to made no mention of *Treasure Island* or its iconic hero (*Times Higher* 2009: cover). The novel itself has thus become a cultural reference point, and its very title conjures images of exotic pirates, treasure maps, and adventures on the high seas for producers of popular culture. From the makers of *The Muppet Treasure Island* in 1996 to a San Francisco event called the Treasure Island Music Festival, a Google search reveals over nine million hits for the term "Treasure Island." Lloyd Osbourne's childhood drawing truly marked the genesis of an entire popular cultural industry.

Conclusion

Much of what has been discussed here concerns the transference of the textual to the visual and aural. Popular culture in our era is dominated by visual consumption, immediate, and gratifying with imagery that works at the meta-level, lingering in our memories long after the detail of plot and character have dissipated. Stevenson was truly a writer of extraordinary imagination, one who knew how to capture the essence of an idea and weave it into a narrative of adventure or gothic horror that is immediate in effect, visually arresting and undeniably enduring. He may be responsible for much more influence than has yet been recognised, and it was thus the purpose of this paper to begin the archaeological work of recovering his place in our popular cultural history.

From the creators of those angst-ridden, duality-plagued comic book heroes, the generations of children brought up on a diet of Christmas pantomimes, to countless screenwriters and television producers, not to mention a wealth of authors of both high brow and popular fiction, the debt that popular culture owes to the imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson has yet to be fully calculated. The general public may well have cause to be grateful for Stevenson's feverish nightmares of a monstrous Hyde-like figure and for his playful urges to entertain his stepson, Lloyd, but that still leaves the question of whether Stevenson's reputation as popular storywriter can co-exist with that of serious author. To nail the point it is worth returning again to Joseph Conrad.

Conrad is undoubtedly one of the great writers of the last hundred years; so is Stevenson. Yet Conrad has always been regarded as a difficult, high-brow writer; Stevenson, as we have seen, suffered from a reductive reputation as a writer of simple tales of adventure and romance for boys. Conrad himself frequently tried to distance his own work from Stevenson and his fiction, stating at one point: "I am no sort of airy R. L. Stevenson who considered his art a prostitute and the artist no better than one" (Karl 1979: 462). He deplored comparisons with Stevenson, and yet when he collaborated with Ford Madox Ford on *Romance* it was their intention to write a story that was Stevensonian in concept and popularity (Karl 1979: 438). They failed dismally; the long rambling narrative of *Romance* may contain pirates and intrigue in an exotic location, but it lacks the clarity, pace and visual impact of a *Treasure Island* or *The Ebb-Tide*.

Although Conrad would never admit it, he was certainly piqued by Stevenson's popular reputation and probably more than a little envious of his ability to evoke the spirit of romance and adventure with such evident commercial success. Stevenson's genius for conjuring vivid images through the power of words contributes to his ability to invoke pity and horror, as with the pathetic site of the dead Israel Hands as seen through the pellucid waters of the lagoon:

> As the water settled, I could see him lying huddled together on the clean, bright sand in the shadow of the vessel's sides. A fish or two whipped past his body. Sometimes, by the quivering of the water, he appeared to move a little, as if he were trying to rise. But he was dead enough for all that, being both shot and drowned, and was food for fish in the very place where he had designed my slaughter.
>
> (Stevenson 1911: 176)

At the end of *Victory* Conrad offers a surprisingly similar view of his drowned villain Gentleman Jones, as described by Captain Davidson:

> 'The water's very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out.' (*Victory* 1925: 411)

The island where the action takes place in *Victory* is a type of *Treasure Island* invaded by Jones and his cronies in search of treasure, and indeed it is strongly suggestive of another of Stevenson's vivid tales of the South Seas, *The Ebb-Tide*. The force of Stevenson's imagination was not lost on Conrad, as evidenced by his intention with *Romance*, and perhaps his image of Jones in his final resting place was prompted by a distant memory of reading about Israel Hands lifeless on the sea-bed. Potential influences such as this problematise Stevenson's reputation as a writer of popular adventure stories for boys and suggest that this reputation can indeed co-exist alongside that of serious author.

It is undeniable that Stevenson's impact both on subsequent authors and on popular culture retains a powerful hold. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Treasure Island* were bestsellers when first published and have never been out of print since. These books have entertained generations of readers and inspired countless cultural spin-offs, and they remain to this day prime examples of how a "cracking good yarn" from the pen of a preternaturally talented writer can take on a life of its own and enter the popular consciousness of the visual, aural and textual media of any era.

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Beyond the Abyss: Jack London and the Working Class

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The first thing that comes to mind in relation to the writings of Jack London is their lasting popularity. Works such as *The Call of the Wild* (1903), *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), *White Fang* (1906), *The Iron Heel* (1908) and *Martin Eden* (1909) have all remained firm favourites among readers both in America and around the world. However, in contrast to much other popular fiction, these books by London have also acquired an iconic status as modern literary classics. Writing about the centenary of London's birth in 1976, Robert Barltrop noted:

> Most popular fiction is essentially ephemeral, having no virtue beyond meeting some need of the hour […] But if a writer continues to give satisfaction to large numbers of people for a long enough period, he becomes entitled to a place of respect in literature. The needs he meets have been shown to be not transient. It is sixty years since Jack London died, and seventy since his major books were written. Most of them are reprinted throughout the literate world. He cannot be dismissed.
> (1976: 179)

In a similar vein, Andrew Sinclair, one of London's many biographers, also pointed to the impact this continued popular appreciation of London's work has had on the critics: "In the past decade, intellectual fashion and literary criticism have begun to resurrect Jack London as a great American author, whom the people have never forgotten" (1978: 250). More recently, Alex Kershaw locates London's lasting appeal in the fusion of life and work that lies at the heart of his writing: "That millions around the globe still read his books is testament not only to the brilliance of his descriptive imagery […] Above all, what keeps Jack London alive – long after his death – is the passion and energy with which he lived, and which still sustains his best prose" (1998: 303).

Another of the distinguishing marks about Jack London was his working-class origins and the influence this had on his writing. It is also this fact that makes him such an unusual American author in the twentieth century. Irving Stone writes in particular of the decisive effect London's formative years had on him: "He was raised in poverty, he knew hunger and deprivation, he had learned harrowing lessons about the fate of the labouring man" (1967: 67). Barltrop also reasserts the importance of London's proletarian literary credentials: "Jack London was in all senses the working man's writer" (1979: 1), while Jonah Raskin, in one of the most recent collections of London's radical writings, states that "he came to represent the downtrodden, the outcast, and the disinherited" (2008: 3). At the same time, Raskin also suggests that London's own experience of class migration from factory worker to successful writer left him with a troubling sense of allegiance towards his own class, an ambivalence that was characterised by both fear and longing: "He felt, too, that he stood at the edge of an abyss, both interior and exterior, and he explored with passion and compassion the lives of the people of the abyss" (2008: 1). This concept of the abyss and the way it came to represent Jack London's conflicting images of the working class are what I want to explore further in this essay. In particular, I want to show how there is a problematic tension between London's perception of the poor as an oppressed, victimised and often degenerate collective and his much more positive depiction of individual members of that class. The key text to focus on in this connection is *The People of the Abyss* (1903), London's own "Glimpse of Inferno" as he called his stay in the East End of London in the summer of 1902 (2001: 27). In this classic work of social reportage, there is, I would claim, an underlying ideological contradiction between the portrayal of an amorphous and demoralised lumpenproletariat and that of the actual working-class people whom London met and whose energy, resourcefulness, articulation and humanity shine through the abysmal condition of their lives.

* * *

London's own heroic efforts to overcome his childhood neglect and lack of education have lead critics and biographers to sometimes view him in nineteenth century philosophical terms as the proverbial Nietzschean superman, a blond beast who succeeded in a life-and-death struggle to emancipate himself from his poverty-stricken background. This, it is claimed, not only determined London's view of the rest of his class from which he had managed to escape, it also created the psychological basis for his later elitism, racism and "obsessive terror of degradation" (Sinclair 1978: 66). Sinclair speculates for instance in this social

Darwinist direction by stating: "To Jack, the survival of the fittest race must precede the victory of the fittest proletariat" (1978: 75). Commenting on London's relation to the working class, Richard O'Connor is another biographer who claims that London's personal and political antipathies were so conflated that he ended up being a "Socialist who believed in the leveling process of revolution at the same time as he raised up the image of a Superman who would rightfully dominate the stupid herd" (1965: 122). The same elitist mantra is repeated by Alex Kershaw, who writes: "Above all, Nietzsche provided Jack with an argument to validate egotism. For it was through him that Jack would discover the theory of the 'superman' – better, stronger, wiser than other men, who would overcome all obstacles. In his quest for power, the superman would speed the selection of the fittest" (1998: 77). In support of this line of biographical correlation, critics have been keen to draw parallels between London and his own larger-than-life fictional characters, in particular Wolf Larsen in *The Sea Wolf* and Martin in *Martin Eden*. It was, however, a comparison that London himself strongly resisted, as Sinclair admits: "/H/e resented people who identified him only with the primordial beast in Larsen" (1978: 96). George Orwell went perhaps the farthest in this trend in literary and biographical correspondence by suggesting that it was a fascist trait in London's own psychological make-up that allowed him to understand how the slum masses could be so easily and dangerously manipulated, as is shown in his novel *The Iron Heel*, by the ruthless dictatorship of the Oligarchy:

> London could foresee Fascism because he had a Fascist streak in himself: or at any rate a marked strain of brutality and an almost unconquerable preference for the strong man as against the weak man […] his instinct lay towards acceptance of a "natural aristocracy" of strength, beauty and talent. Intellectually he knew […] that Socialism ought to mean the meek inheriting the earth, but that was not what his temperament demanded. (Orwell 1968: 25-6)

There is behind all this speculative literary psychology an attempt to discredit London's commitment to socialism and the working class. Without doubt, London was an individualist autodidact, who adopted conflicting ideas and social philosophies sometimes haphazardly, but it was also his own proletarian experience that gave his thought its radical political edge. London knew himself what real poverty was like and how it could destroy people's lives. He strove with great determination to escape from its terrifying clutches. However, in his depiction of the slums, it is true London often reverts to the clichéd conventions of sensationalist, yellow-press journalism. For example, the image of an urban abyss, in which the struggle for survival is expressed in social Darwinist terms, was a well-established trope at the time, something that London recycled uncritically in his own writing.[1] The term "The People of the Abyss" for instance, London borrowed from H.G.Wells who, in his book *Anticipations* (1902), referred to the "great useless masses of people, the People of the Abyss" (1902: 211).[2] In words typical of the Victorian sociological debate, Wells depicts an inexorable process of degeneracy and decline of an ultimately doomed species of primitive slum dwellers:

> [T]his bulky irremovable excretion, the appearance of these gall stones of vicious, helpless, and pauper masses. There seems every reason to suppose that this phenomenon of unemployed citizens, who are, in fact, unemployable, will remain present as a class, perishing individually and individually renewed, so long as civilization remains progressive and experimental upon its present lines. Their drowning existences may be utilized, the crude hardship of their lot may be concealed or mitigated, they may react upon the social fabric that is attempting to eliminate them, in very astounding ways, but their presence and their individual doom, it seems to me, will be unavoidable – at any rate, for many generations of men. They are an integral part of this physiological process of mechanical progress,

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[1] In his anthology, *Into Unknown England 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers*, Peter Keating writes of the Victorian connotations of the Abyss: "An abyss still conveys enough sense of distance to be attractive to the social explorer, but it carries with it an eeriness which replaces the more exotic associations of travel. You don't journey *to* an abyss: you descend or fall into it. It is all very well claiming that a Dark Continent lies at one's doorstep but that metaphorically is more welcome than a gaping hole. And what may walk out of an African rain forest is one thing, what *climbs* out of an abyss is quite another" (1976: 20-1).

[2] In *The Iron Heel*, London writes: "*The people of the abyss* – this phrase was struck out by the genius of H. G. Wells in the late nineteenth century A.D. Wells was a sociological seer, sane and normal as well as warmly human. Many fragments of his work have come down to us, while two of his greatest achievements, 'Anticipations' and 'Mankind in the Making', have come down intact" (2006: 180-1).

> as inevitable in the social body as are waste matters and disintegrating cells in the body of an active and healthy man. (1902: 81-2)

Similar socially determinist prejudice can, without doubt, be found scattered throughout London's writings, not least in *The People of the Abyss*. However, as I will try to show, these are primarily used as the rhetorical framing of his exposé of slum life, something that is constantly subverted by the portrayal of individual East Enders with whom London came into contact. The life stories of these people fundamentally undermine the image of a feckless class of poor that was being evolved out of existence by some ineluctable process of natural selection.

Not surprisingly, the opening chapter of *The People of the Abyss*, entitled "The Descent", introduces the reader to the characteristic setting of a Victorian slum, a primordial underworld populated by a race of subhuman Morlocks who, as in H. G. Wells's apocalyptic novel *The Time Machine* (1895), threaten almost physically to overwhelm the social explorer:

> The streets were filled with a new and different race of people, short of stature, and of wretched or beer-sodden appearance […] little children clustered like flies around a festering mass of fruit, thrusting their arms to the shoulders into the liquid corruption, and drawing forth morsels but partially decayed, which they devoured on the spot […] And as far as I could see were the solid walls of brick, the slimy pavements, and the screaming streets; and for the first time in my life the fear of the crowd smote me. It was like the fear of the sea; and the miserable multitudes, street upon street, seemed so many waves of a vast and malodorous sea, lapping about me and threatening to well up and over me. (2001: 3-4)

Doubtlessly, the nightmarish atmosphere in a passage like the above touches upon some deep-seated anxieties, yet at the same time London's description is contrived, melodramatic and full of mixed metaphors—racial, animal and maritime—that leave one wondering about the reality that lies behind. What we can also discern is the voice of London himself as an up-and-coming writer-turned-reporter, straining for dramatic effect, producing sensational copy that would, hopefully, both impress editors and shock readers back home in America.

In contrast, however, the first representative of this exotic urban jungle that London meets, described in a chapter called "A Man and the Abyss", presents us with a very different view of the slums: a young Cockney sailor, who alternates between working at sea as a stoker and enjoying a more pleasure-seeking unemployed existence on land. A decidedly happy-go-lucky character, whose lifestyle consciously challenges the traditional domestic ideals extolled by London himself in the book. Moreover, subverting the Victorian stereotype of the semi-inarticulate slum dweller, this young man is both verbally fluent and full of humorous scepticism towards the kind of patriarchal family values and work ethic that London deems to recommend to him. Clearly, there is much here to affront the moralising Victorian philanthropist who, like London, bemoans the intemperance of the poor. Despite London's attempts to discredit him and his dissipated lifestyle, the youth comes across as a real Artful Dodger, who takes his fun while he can, because he knows just how precarious life can be in the slums. He is a streetwise figure almost straight out of Dickens:

> 'Garn!' he cried, with a playful shove of his fist on my shoulder. 'Wot's yer game, eh? A missus kissin' an' kids clim'in', an' kettle singin', all on four poun' ten a month w'en you 'ave a ship, an' four nothin' w'en you 'aven't. I'll tell you wot I'd get on four poun' ten – a missus rowin', kids squallin', no coal t' make the kettle sing, an' the kettle up the spout, that's wot I'd get. Enough t' make a bloke bloomin' well glad to be back t' sea. A missus! Wot for? T' make you mis'rable? Kids? Jest take my counsel, matey, an' don't 'ave 'em. Look at me! I can 'ave beer w'en I like, an' no blessed missus an' kids a-crying for bread. I'm 'appy, I am. With my beer an' mates like you, an' a good ship comin', an' another trip to sea. So I say, let's 'ave another pint. Arf an' arf's good enough for me.' (2001: 18-9)

Despite the impression of a lively young worker making the best of his chances for what enjoyment his income can afford, London's reaction is overbearingly negative, condemning the man as an "unconscious hedonist, utterly unmoral and materialistic" (2001: 19). It is as though the middle-class observer in London is challenged by someone who harbours no illusions about what sort of family life is on offer at four pounds a week. Since his appeals about the attractions of "a wife and children" and a "home of your own" (18) all fall on stony ground, London is left perplexed, able only to conclude with an exasperated Malthusian outburst that "day by day I became convinced that not only is it unwise, but it is criminal for the people of the Abyss to marry":

> They are the stones by the builder rejected. There is no place for them, in the social fabric, while all the forces of society drive them downward till they perish. At the bottom of the Abyss they are feeble, besotted, and imbecile. If they reproduce, the life is so cheap that perforce it perishes of itself. The work of the world goes on

> above them, and they do no care to take part in it, nor are they able. Moreover, the work of the world does not need them. There are plenty, far fitter than they, clinging to the steep slope above, and struggling frantically to slide no more. (2001: 20)

This bitter attack on the improvidence of the poor seems a far cry from the rebel hobo that London was once himself and about which he wrote much more sympathetically in his essay "The Road" (1897), referring to young social drop-outs like the above as "romantic and unruly boys, who venture along its dangerous ways in search of fortune or in rash attempt to escape parental discipline" (Quoted in Raskin 2008: 65).

What I am trying to argue here is that there is a disconcerting narrative gap in *The People of the Abyss* between London's intellectual apprehension of slum life, which is distant and usually damning, and his actual depiction of the people themselves. In the latter context, London goes on to document a range of individual case studies that point to an East End population that is not only more resilient, but also much more aware and consciously critical of their social and economic predicament.

The experience of two homeless men, one who has worked as a carter, the other as a carpenter, provides another early illustration in the text of this curious discrepancy between what London thinks and what he sees. Despite their state of abject destitution, it is nevertheless clear that it is old age that has brought the two men low, not alcohol or crime. London is nevertheless horrified to observe how they are driven by hunger to eat scraps of food they find in the gutter, proof, it seems, of their degenerate physical and mental status:

> *From the slimy, spittle-drenched, sidewalk, they were picking up bits of orange peel, apple skin, and grape stems, and they were eating them. The pits of greengage plums they cracked between their teeth for the kernels inside. They picked up stray bits of bread the size of peas, apple cores so black and dirty one would not take them to be apple cores, and these things these two men took into their mouths, and chewed them, and swallowed them; and this, between six and seven o'clock in the evening of August 20, year of our Lord 1902, in the heart of the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire the world has ever seen*. (2001: 39)

The passage is purposely italicised in the text in order to accentuate its didactic impact. It is an example of London's rhetorical use throughout the book of contrasting the glaring inequalities between high and low in order to show how society creates enormous wealth but is incapable of sharing it. In particular the riches that are flaunted in connection with the then ongoing celebrations of the coronation of Edward VII. There is certainly a strong sense of radical indignation in a passage like the above, but also an element of morbid fascination with the depths of human degradation to which the poor could sink. However, once London gets to talk to these two men on a more personal level, another, more complex insight emerges into their working-class experience and outlook. It is significant, for instance, that when London reveals himself as the visiting journalist he actually is, one who has money in his pocket, the instinctive class suspicions of the two men are immediately aroused: "And at once they shut up like clams. I was not of their kind; my speech had changed, the tones of my voice were different, in short, I was a superior, and they were superbly class conscious" (2001: 43).

During their search for a dosshouse bed for the night, London is clearly impressed by the men's eloquence and political awareness, even though he abstains from actually quoting what they say about the world and the way it is divided up. This would of course further complicate London's portrayal of the inhabitants of the East End as passive and generally unreflecting victims of circumstances. Their discussion is therefore left rather vague. One would have loved to hear what the men really have to say, but we are only left with London's own remarks that remain patronisingly dismissive of their views:

> These two men talked. They were not fools, they were merely old. And, naturally, their guts a-reek with pavement offal, they talked of bloody revolution. They talked as anarchists, fanatics and madmen would talk. And who shall blame them? In spite of my three good meals that day, and the snug bed I could occupy if I wished, and my social philosophy, and my evolutionary belief in the slow development and metamorphosis of things – in spite of this, I say, I felt impelled to talk rot with them or hold my tongue. Poor fools! Not of their sort are revolutions bred. And when they are dead and dust, which will be shortly, other fools will talk bloody revolution as they gather offal from the spittle-drenched sidewalk along Mile End Road to Poplar Workhouse. (2001: 39)

What is significant is not only how London reveals more about his own opinions than those of the two homeless men, but also how he exerts himself to allay any possible concerns about social revolution on the part of his readers. Referring to journalists who, like London, went slumming among the masses, Peter Keating notes that an "element of class fear, whether from contagious diseases or revolution, is never entirely absent from the work of early social explorers, but the repeated use of the word 'abyss' marks a real change of attitude. It reflects a feeling of despair at worsening social conditions and at the inability of existing institutions to deal with the problem; it reflects also a corresponding concern of growing militancy of the working-class movement that was apparent in public demonstrations, politics, and trade union activity" (1976: 20). In London's case, it is perhaps more surprising that he recycles the stereotyped, middle-class prejudice that working-class radicalism was linked to social anarchy and acts of bomb-throwing terrorism. This politically dubious suggestion recurs on a number of occasions throughout the book. For example, when London asks a man sleeping rough on a bench in Green Park what he thinks of the Coronation procession, his feelings of violent desperation are recorded, but left without further explication:

> 'I couldn't sleep, a-lyin' there an' thinkin' 'ow I'd worked all the years o' my life an' now 'ad no plyce to rest my 'ead; an' the music comin' to me, an' the cheers an' cannon, till I got almost a hanarchist an' wanted to blow out the brains o' the Lord Chamberlain.' (2001: 77)

Another example of the politically conscious worker whom London meets in the abyss is Dan Cullen, a former docker and trade unionist, who has been blacklisted for years by the employers as punishment for his active commitment to the cause of labour. Not only does the meeting with this old militant compel London to drop at least for a while the social Darwinist jargon he often reverts to in his reportage. It also affords him a glimpse into some of the social and economic forces that lie behind the impoverishment of the working class in the East End. Most of the inhabitants London meets do not shirk work. Indeed, they work harder than most in trying to get by. It is the class system that crushes them, not some innate fecklessness or brutal ignorance. Dan Cullen represents the voice of the class-conscious worker, someone who has fought all his life both for himself and others. There is, therefore, a strong sense of hard-won experience, of real solidarity and of a radical spirit that has been done down by circumstances beyond his control:

> The man who had occupied this hole, one Dan Cullen, docker, was dying in hospital. Yet he had impressed his personality on his miserable surroundings sufficiently to give an inkling as to what sort of man he was. On the walls were cheap pictures of Garibaldi, Engels, Dan Burns, and other labour leaders, while on the table lay one of Walter Besant's novels. He knew his Shakespeare, I was told, and had read history,

> sociology, and economics. And he was self-educated […] He became a leader of the fruit-porters, represented the dockers on the London Trades Council, and wrote trenchant articles for the labour journals. (2001: 83-4)

Because of his efforts to improve the lot of his class, Cullen had for over ten years been given little or no work as a casual labourer by the employers in a cynical attempt to starve him into submission. London writes candidly of this blacklisting: "This is what is called being 'disciplined', or 'drilled'. It means being starved. There is no politer word" (84). It is also significant to note, as London does, that, despite being brought low by both starvation and illness, Dan Cullen still wants no truck with moralising, middle-class philanthropists. When he discovers, for example, that the nurse who is washing him is the sister of Sir George Blank, "solicitor to the docks at Cardiff, who, more than any other man, had broken up the Dockers' Union of Cardiff, and was knighted", the old militant reasserts himself and his sense of solidarity based on class interest and not charity:

> Thereupon Dan Cullen sat up on his crazy couch and pronounced anathema upon her and all her breed; and she fled, to return no more, strongly impressed with the ungratefulness of the poor. (85)

The same dismissive response is shown to a religious do-gooder who tries to bribe Cullen with "a pair of paper slippers, worth fourpence" (85) and prayers for his soul. In a gesture charged with meaning, London witnesses how an inhabitant of the abyss is not always ready to sell himself at any cost: "He asked the missionary kindly to open the window, so that he might toss the slippers out. And the missionary went away, to return no more, likewise impressed with the ungratefulness of the poor" (85).

The role of charity is a central issue in London's reportage, since it relates to the whole question of what sort of public assistance the poor were to receive. The Victorian poor laws were generally harsh and restrictive, very much influenced by the Malthusian claim that the poor were incapable of helping themselves and charity would therefore only prolong the agony of their inevitable demise. As Gareth Stedman Jones writes, quoting from the debate of the time about the different categories of the so-called "nomad poor": "Twenty per cent were 'genuinely unemployed'; another forty per cent were 'feckless and incapable'. The remaining forty per cent however were wholly degenerate: 'physically, mentally and morally unfit, there is nothing that the nation can do for these men except to let them die out by leaving them alone'" (1976: 288-9). This cynical refusal to see poverty as a consequence of broader, laissez-faire economic forces and instead to put the blame on the individual poor themselves has been a recurring theme in the public debate about welfare "scroungers" in Britain through to our own times.[3]

London's own attitude to the poor is contradictory, as I have tried to show. In theory, he subscribes to the Malthusian discourse, but in practice the reality of people's lives tells a very different tale. On only one occasion in the book does London acknowledge, however, the ideological prejudice that threatens to undermine the documentary value of his account. It is a strange and sudden admission that is left, unfortunately, without any further comment: "Sometimes I become afraid of my own generalizations upon the massed misery of this Ghetto life, and feel that my impressions are exaggerated, that I am too close to the picture and lack perspective" (2001: 120).

These discrepancies become glaring, however, when London compares the standard of living of a person in regular work and the life of someone who is both unemployed and homeless. It is in this perspective that the option of charity, or a night spent in the "casual ward", exposes the punitive function of so-called poor relief, and why the poor would seek to avoid such help at all costs. London is forced to admit that the help of such institutions was in fact a philanthropic cover for the cruel exploitation of those who are at the bottom of the social scale:

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[3] In a recent article, "A portrait of 21st century poverty", Amelia Gentleman writes: "The tabloid portrayal of the poor as idle scroungers has done a lot to weaken public sympathy for the cause, even though new data shows that the majority of children living in poverty have at least one parent who is working, but who is paid so little that the family remains below the breadline. The emphasis on child poverty, rather than just poverty generally, is partly aimed at deflating this tendency to blame the poor – the argument being that you can't blame the children for their situation – but it has still failed to energise public support for the cause" (2009).

> It is a matter of sober calculation, here in England, that it is softer to work for twenty shillings a week, and have regular food, and a bed at night, than it is to walk the streets. The man who walks the streets suffers more, and works harder, for far less return. I have depicted the nights they spend, and how, driven in by physical exhaustion, they go to the casual ward for a 'rest up'. Nor is the casual ward a soft snap. To pick four pounds of oakum, break twelve hundredweight of stones, or perform the most revolting tasks, in return for the miserable food and shelter they receive, is an unqualified extravagance on the part of the men who are guilty of it. On the part of the authorities it is sheer robbery. They give the men far less for their labour than do the capitalist employers. (2001: 103)

The same prospect applies to women who are faced with the gates of the workhouse, that Malthusian instrument of collective punishment that became the most hated symbol of the Victorian poor law. "I'll drown myself before I go into the workhouse", says Ellen Hughes Hunt, who refuses to accompany her poverty-stricken husband to a paupers' prison and who is later declared insane after drowning herself in Regent's Canal. London's reactions to her tragic fate go beyond all the deterministic rhetoric about the ultimate demise of the poor and touch instead upon the real life-and-death choices of such unfortunate individuals: "As to which is the preferable sojourning place is a matter of opinion, of intellectual judgement. I, for one, from what I know of canals and workhouses, should choose the canal, were I in a similar position. And I make bold to contend that I am no more insane than Ellen Hughes Hunt" (2001: 142).

The reference to the fate of this individual woman of the abyss is also unusual in that London's book is generally biased towards the men. There are more personal encounters with men than women. However, even more stereotypically, the collective images of the abysmal netherworld are mostly associated with demoralised, dishevelled and debased females, often mothers, to whom London reacts with particular horror. These women seem to epitomize in London's mind the most shocking aspect of subhumanity in the East End and he both begins and ends his book with examples of this particular form of female depravity. One of the recurring images of the moral degeneration of the slums, as portrayed in the fiction of writers of this time such as George Gissing and Arthur Morrison, is that of a street fight between two women, a scene that plays on all the scopophilic fascination and horror of the male observer. London follows on in this gendered tradition by depicting a similar outburst of female street violence:

> As I write this, and for an hour past, the air has been made hideous by a free-for-all, rough-and-tumble fight going on in the yard that is back to back with my yard. When the first sounds reached me I took it for the barking and snarling of dogs, and some minutes were required to convince me that human beings, and women at that, could produce such a fearful clamour.
>
> Drunken women fighting! It is not nice to think of; it is far worse to listen to.
>
> (2001: 25)

The self-revelatory detail here is the reference to dogs, a comparison that suggests the primitive bestiality of these women who fight like animals. The fact that a child is involved in the fight is a further moral pointer that these women are so much less than human for having abandoned their proper maternal instincts. London recycles in this way yet another clichéd image of the negative parental capabilities of the poor. This trope goes back a long way. The same sort of middle-class moral outrage is reflected in William Hogarth's painting of *Gin Lane* (1751), in which he depicts a drunken mother letting her baby fall helplessly from her breast down some stone steps in a London backstreet. Towards the end of his own journey into the abyss, London repeats this attack on unnatural mothers in another social Darwinist tirade about an urban zoo whose inhabitants are more ape-like than human:

> But they were not the only beasts that ranged the menagerie. They were only here and there, lurking in dark courts and passing like grey shadows along the walls; but the women from whose rotten loins they spring were everywhere. They whined insolently, and in maudlin tones begged me for pennies, and worse. They held carouse in every boozing ken, slatternly, unkempt, bleary-eyed, and towsled, leering and gibbering, overspilling with foulness and corruption, and, gone in debauch, sprawling across benches and bars, unspeakably repulsive, fearful to look upon.
>
> (2001: 152)

The above passage is permeated with all the social and sexual fears of the male social explorer, being openly solicited by these slum women. London's lurid, hyperbolic description not only plays upon the middle-class panic about sexual promiscuity and infection, but also the accompanying eugenic debate about the dissipated poor whose destiny it is to disappear, the sooner the better, from the face of the earth. It seems as though the complete debasement of these women is the final proof that such people have lost all semblance of human feeling and are therefore unfit to reproduce their own kind.

Such sweeping Malthusian generalisations are, however, once more put into question by those few individual women of the abyss whom London does manage to meet and speak to. Here, instead of demoralised and drunken harridans, we find hard-working wives and mothers who have managed to carve out a life for themselves and their families. They most certainly do not belong to a population of irredeemable shirkers, but are women with a strong sense of parental duty, who have also succeeded through their own efforts to survive in an extremely hostile social environment. The person who epitomises this ordinary day-to-day domestic struggle is “The Sea Wife”, whom London meets in Maidstone while he is on the trail of the migrant labourers that leave the city for the hop-picking season in Kent. Moreover, London’s encounter with Mr and Mrs Mugridge confront him with yet another contrast to the colonialist concept of a descent into darkest England: “I went down through the skin and the flesh to the naked soul of it, and in Thomas Mugridge and his old woman gripped hold of the essence of this remarkable English breed” (2001: 94). What London is trying to say, once one peels away the metaphysical jargon, is that, in this so-called netherworld, he keeps coming across living and feeling men and women, not some degenerate collective subspecies. The contradiction in the text between ideological abstraction and social reality is thus once again apparent. Yet London himself never reflects critically on this contrast between the way the poor are demonized in the public debate and the indefatigable efforts of hard-working people he comes across in his travels. Mrs Mugridge turns out to be just one more of this remarkable class of toilers who has worked continuously from childhood to old age, bringing up fifteen children along the way:

> Mrs Mugridge was seventy-three. From seven years of age she had worked in the fields, doing a boy’s work at first, and later a man’s. She still worked, keeping the house shining, washing, boiling, and baking, and, with my advent, cooking for me and shaming me by making my bed. At the end of threescore years and more of work they possessed nothing, had nothing to look forward to save more work.
>
> (2001: 94-5)

London’s overall characterisation of the old couple remains, nevertheless, typically condescending, referring to their conversation in animalistic terms “as meditative and vacant as the chewing of a heifer’s cud” (2001: 95). Indeed, he sees the old woman primarily as a patient and uncomplaining breeder of cannon fodder, part of a working population who "docilely […] yield the best of its sons to fight and colonise to the ends of the earth" (2001: 94). Once again, he feels impelled to suggest there is no threat of political revolt from these hard done to people, something that the reader is meant to feel either as a pity or a relief, it is unclear which.

When *The People of the Abyss* was serialized in an American periodical, *Wilshire's Magazine*, in 1903, it was an immediate publishing success, transforming London's status as a popular writer: "Previously known mainly to the socialists of the west coast, London now became a national figure" (Lindsay 1978: 6). It was also as a book much debated in the press, both in Britain and America. Most reviewers were positive, impressed by the documentary power of London's investigation of the slums. As the British *The Independent* newspaper wrote, London "made it real and present to us" (Quoted in Lindsay 1978: 7). Later on in his life, London was to refer to the work as his own particular favourite: "Of all my books, I love most *The People of the Abyss*. No other book of mine took so much of my young heart and tears as that study of the economic degradation of the poor" (Quoted in Kearshaw 1998: 119). Upton Sinclair nevertheless recalled how fundamentally traumatic the whole experience of visiting the East End had been for London: "[F]or years afterwards the memories of this stunted and depraved population haunted him beyond all peace" (Quoted in Lindsay 1978: 6). These two very differing personal reactions—empathy and horror—sum up the underlying dichotomy in London's depiction of the East End poor. Torn between his preconceived ideas of a social Darwinist slum jungle and the much more sympathetic personal impression that working-class people had on him, the book itself struggles with a narrative contradiction that remains unresolved and deeply problematic. As I have tried to show in this essay, despite London's Malthusian rhetoric, the individual members of the East End working class come across in his book as far from helpless and hopelessly doomed to destruction. Almost writing subconsciously back at himself, London subverts his own demonised collective image of degradation by introducing the reader to a range of characters, who express a profounder understanding, a greater resilience and a more playful sense of humour than the subterranean concept of the people of the abyss could ever suggest.

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Whose Rules Rule?: Grammar Controversies, Popular Culture and the Fear of English from Below

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Like a controversy should

In 1954, the host of CBS's *Morning Show* and broadcast-journalist icon, Walter Cronkite, refused to read the then new advertising jingle for Winston cigarettes. Given today's consensus on the negative effects of cigarette smoking, a present-day observer might assume that Cronkite's reluctance to endorse the product was connected to some prescient knowledge about the health hazards related to nicotine consumption. This, however, was not the basis for Cronkite's reaction; the actual reason is perhaps harder to grasp—Cronkite simply did not approve of the grammar in the slogan he was supposed to read, i.e. "*Winston tastes good* <u>*like*</u> *a cigarette should*". The prevailing traditionalist prescription at the time was that *like* should not be used as a conjunction—the correct conjunction, according to that view, should have been *as*.

The reactions of one, perhaps linguistically conservative journalist, do not necessarily confirm a usage as controversial, but the commotion involved more than Cronkite's refusal to read the jingle as written. According to Geoffrey Nunberg (2004: xiii) in his preface to *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century*, when Merriam-Webster published its *Third New International Dictionary* (referred to henceforth as W3) in 1961, it included the use of *like* as a conjunction in a way which suspiciously echoed the Winston ad.[1] Many critics were

[1] Some sources, like the much maligned but generally informative *Wikipedia*, claim that the W3 actually cited the ad: "In the dictionary, the editors refused to condemn the use of 'like' as a conjunction, and cited 'Winston tastes good like a cigarette should' as an example of popular colloquial use" (see *Winston tastes good like a cigarette should* (2009). This, however, is not the case; the relevant part of the entry is as follows: "in accordance with the way in which: the way that <*the violin now sounds* like *an old masterpiece should*>" (see the entry for *like* in the W3, 1961). Whether or not the editors of the W3 cited the ad in the

incensed about this perceived lax attitude to language usage and "[t]he dictionary's derelictions were front-page news for months – The New York times condemned it as a **Bolshevik document** and the Chicago Daily News took it as the symptom of '**a general decay in values**'" (Nunberg 2004: xiii, my emphasis).[2]

Interestingly enough, the slightly flawed *Wikipedia* entry on this subject points out a useful connection between the ad and the concept of a "tipping point" as mentioned by Malcolm Gladwell in his 2002 book of the same name. According to Gladwell (2002: 25), the "ungrammatical and somehow provocative use of 'like' instead of 'as' created a minor sensation" when the ad was released and Gladwell goes even further to imply that the phrase itself may have helped to boost the sales of the cigarettes, eventually resulting in Winston's number one position on the market in 1971.

So, who really cares?

Other than operate as a humorous linguistic anecdote, many scholars may wonder if such an incident can offer any scholarly insights or tell us anything meaningful about English or language in general.

In this paper, I explore the idea that such controversies are relevant and important subjects of study. With a small selection of examples of Non-standard English in Popular Culture as a platform, I look at the "controversial" usage in question, discuss the pertinent linguistic issues and, when relevant, consider the reactions and uproar they have sometimes triggered. My aim is to show that underlying such controversies are broader cultural and social issues and in the process I sketch out some of the most central questions about the relationship between Popular Culture and language.

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ensuing public debate has not been confirmed, but the *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989: 600-603) does explicitly mention the ad and provides an interesting article on the controversy over the use of conjunctive *like*.

[2] It should be noted that the condemnation of the W3 was not based solely on the use of *like* as a conjunction, the reviews mentioned above also disapproved of the inclusion of words like *ain't* and *irregardless* among other things (see Nunberg 2004: xiii).

This study is eclectic in its approach and theory, primarily using a straightforward modern descriptive framework to discuss questions of usage, but also employing different concepts and terminology from sociolinguistics, sociology and cultural studies, such as *symbolic capital*,[3] *critical literacy*,[4] *dominant ideology*[5] and *moral panic*[6] to interpret the background to the usage, the nature of the controversy and to situate these in behavior and attitudes.

Using Popular Culture as a resource to study English

For the vast majority of grammarians, it is relatively unfamiliar territory in academic research to examine and understand English through the lens of Popular Culture and, to my knowledge, very little work has been done within this specific methodology. Linguists who do use Popular Culture in their research often study English and Popular Culture in language learning situations (e.g. Priesler 1999a & b; Zuengler 2003, Marsh *et al* 2005; Marsh 2005, among others). Sometimes, Popular Culture may be discussed in sociolinguistic research as a way of understanding the language of various subcultural groups (often, but certainly not always, focused on AAVE and Hip-Hop) (c.f., for example, Alim 2006; Pennycook 2003; Priesler 1999a & b; Beers-Fägersten 2008, to mention only a few). In addition, many of these studies concentrate on the effect of Popular Culture on so-called “global” English (again, mainly focusing on Hip-Hop and Rap and its effect on the spread of English, see, for example, Pennycook 1994 & 2007).

There is also a growing amount of research in so-called Multimodality (see, for example, Kress 2009, for a textbook overview of the subject), which seeks to expand on traditional linguistic approaches to understanding language in a much broader sense and thus includes, for example, images, music, graphic design, etc, in its scope. In a fashion similar to Critical Discourse Analysis, multimodality seeks to reveal

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[3] À la Bourdieu 1984.
[4] As the term is used by people such as Norman Fairclough, 1995a & b and 2001, for example.
[5] Typically associated with Marxist theory, in particular Gramsci 1971.
[6] In the sense of Cohen 1972.

underlying ideologies and power relations which are woven into any given "text". Because of multimodality's wider sense of language, it naturally includes many examples of Popular Culture materials such as ads, websites, music videos, signs, etc.

Not many studies take the actual Popular Culture artifacts, i.e. lyrics, advertising jingles, movie/TV dialog, as the object of linguistic study themselves (a few exceptions include Trudgill 1983, Rey 2001, Trotta 2003 and Quaglio 2009 and Kreyer (forthcoming)). Therefore, before I deal with the specific topic of language usage controversies, it is relevant to first address the more general question about the usefulness of Popular Culture as a resource for the study of English grammar and language in general, i.e. why bother with the English encountered in Popular Culture when most respectable qualitative and quantities studies rely on methods such as introspection, corpora[7] and informant testing? What can the language found in Popular Culture contribute to the study of English?

First of all, Popular Culture is worth studying, not only because "it is there" in the proverbial Mount-Everest sense of the phrase, but because it is **everywhere**; most of us are exposed to it on a daily basis and we would need to go to extraordinary lengths to avoid it. It is a major vehicle for the introduction of new linguistic phenomena, which can quickly become part of the collective consciousness of speakers. By this, I do not mean to say it is necessarily assimilated and used, but rather that it enters our "awareness", not to mention dictionaries and usage books.[8]

Secondly, Popular Culture plays a major role in the way knowledge and values are constructed and mediated. Regardless of whether this reality is desirable, the plain fact is that many people, especially young

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[7] It is noteworthy in this context that several of the larger, more modern corpora include subgenres that could well be considered "Popular Culture", for example *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) is a 400 million word corpus that includes data from sources like popular magazines and movie scripts (see Davies 2008).

[8] Some recent lexico-grammatical theories (e.g. Hoey 2005) emphasize the fact that our knowledge of a word and its concomitant grammar are dependent on our experiences with it—thus oft-encountered non-standard usage in Popular Culture contexts can prime speakers for variations that they would not otherwise come across.

people, acquire a significant amount of knowledge about the world (and language) through Popular Culture (see, for example Zuengler 2003, or Baumgartner & Morris 2006, which examines the effect a TV comedy show like *The Daily Show* can have on the political opinions of young viewers). Thus, understanding Popular Culture can help us to understand current trends and opinions, not only about "real" world facts, but also about language, language use and the way in which linguistic representations of certain social groups in the popular media can affect the way we perceive those groups.

Thirdly, studying Popular Culture phenomena helps us to improve our general literacy and enhances our ability to understand texts on many levels and in many dimensions. In traditional academic contexts, literacy and critical literacy are typically taught through the canon. However important it may be to understand the concept of standard English and those texts which exemplify it, theories of language are nothing if they cannot be applied to the language that surrounds us in everyday, Popular Culture contexts. Put another way, the language found in revered and widely-read authors like Tennyson, Austen, Dickens, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, etc., may tell us one story about English, whereas the language of Snoop Dogg, Tony Soprano, Homer Simpson, etc., may tell us another.

Fourthly, according to Priesler (1999a & b), in EFL countries (like Priesler's native Denmark), "passive" English language situations like watching TV, listening to music, using the internet, etc., are generally the most common form of contact with English. Much of the use of English in such countries is more related to the subcultural identity of the individual than the fact that it is a mandatory school subject or that English is presumed to have some intrinsic, superior value as a foreign language. In other words, the main driving force for using English in some EFL countries is that language's integral role as a lifestyle symbol and identity marker. In such cases, the English found in Popular Culture is important and note-worthy since it constitutes the source for imitation by language learners.

Finally, though Popular Culture may not typically be the main focus for linguistic study, examples from fiction and the mass media are not really all that unfamiliar in linguistic circles. Prominent scholars such as Stephen Pinker often reference Popular Culture for effect and many well-regarded, authoritative, grammarians such as Jespersen, Curme and

Poutsma often collected examples from the "popular" culture of the time, albeit edited, written language such as that found in print journalism and novels. As mentioned previously, the COCA corpus contains data from sources like magazines and movie scripts, but it is worth noting that even other "mainstream" corpora flirt with Popular Culture material. For example, the British National Corpus, the Cobuild Corpus, and even the more traditionally compiled Brown "family" of Corpora,[9] include data from popular periodicals and fictional texts from a wide variety of genres (Romance, Western, Science Fiction, among others).

On linguistic controversies, Popular Culture and English from below

Unusual usages, neologisms and catchphrases from Popular Culture have a certain power that is difficult to ignore; they seem to carry more weight since they are not simply evidence of any one particular speaker's usage, but rather appear to derive from a higher authority in much the same way that the written word is often said to be perceived as more powerful than the spoken. Reactions are therefore stronger and controversies take on a different proportion since we are "forced" to read/listen to (and perhaps accept) a usage to a degree that would be much less dramatic if it were the product of only a single user, from a specific and identifiable "other" dialect or understood in some narrow or negligible linguistic context.

A linguistic controversy in Popular Culture may highlight an important stage in the development of a grammatical construction. Changes in grammar, unlike changes in vocabulary, are slow, long-term processes and many of the usages discussed in this paper were not "invented" for a specific purpose in Popular Culture, but rather they have been in existence previously and then exploited in Popular Culture media for various reasons. It is tempting to speculate that their appearance on the Popular Culture scene could well provide a kind of "tipping point" (to borrow Gladwell's terminology mentioned above) in the development and usage of the relevant construction, i.e. they may be legitimized and

[9] The Brown Family of Corpora includes the Brown and LOB corpora (consisting of American and British texts from 1961), and the so-called FROWN and FLOB corpora (which mirror the composition of Brown and LOB corpora with texts from 1991).

mimicked after the Popular Culture publicity, which in turn brings exposure to more speakers who may then pick up on the usage in a type of mutual feedback loop between local and global forces (see Trotta 1998: 104).

Linguistically controversial examples in Popular Culture can serve as a platform to investigate broader cultural and social issues such as how grammaticality is established and who has authority over what shall be deemed correct, acceptable linguistic behavior and what shall not. In this context, they highlight the emotional attachment speakers can sometimes have to certain grammatical "rules" and their insistence on maintaining them in the face of logic, reason and usage. There is a certain symbolic capital (cf. Bourdieu 1984 & 1991) in mastering the grammar of English, and knowing the rules allows us to pass judgments on those who seemingly do not. Because of this, these examples can help us to understand the anxieties many speakers have about certain usages, their concerns about embarrassing verbal *faux pas* and their desire to understand the shibboleths that separate "us" and "them".

In this context, the parallels between non-standard (NSE) vs. standard English (SE) and Popular vs. "Elite" Culture are striking:

- Standard English (SE) and the canon of "high" culture come from "above", Non-standard English (NSE) and "popular" culture come from "below".
- Knowledge of the conventions of SE, just like familiarity with artifacts of high culture, conveys symbolic capital.
- NSE & popular culture can trigger a reaction of moral panic (cf. Cohen 1972), i.e. they are often perceived as threatening to society. For some they signal a decline in morality, values and taste.[10]
- SE is codified in reference works; high culture is codified in anthologies, histories, university literature lists, etc.
- The logic for the "higher" value of SE and high culture is often circular and self-perpetuating fear

[10] See, for example, Battistella 2005: 41-66 for a detailed discussion of how the relationship between concerns for the health of the English language and the fear of moral and social decay have been woven into early prescriptivists' approaches to grammar.

Considering the points above, an examination of grammar controversies in context allows us to reflect on the usage and the user with a mind to what is at stake socially and ideologically.

To boldly go where every grammarian has gone before, again
Many a grammar discussion has begun using Captain Kirk's infamously bold split infinitive:

> Space... the Final Frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, **to boldly go** where no man has gone before. (Prologue voiceover, *Star Trek* (Original Series), 1966-1969, my emphasis.)

This construction has been considered by so many linguists that even a shortlist of the most widely-read and respected ones would still be fairly long (see for example Ohlander 1999, for a comprehensive discussion of the construction and the controversy). Though discussions often begin with the fact that many people still react negatively to split infinitives like the one above, the question often leads to an investigation of the so-called rule itself, i.e. how ungrammatical or stylistically ungraceful is the split infinitive actually, and on what is the prohibition against it based? The consensus on the issue is quite clear; the split infinitive in English is not, nor has it ever been ungrammatical. Even the earliest discussions by the foremost authorities (e.g. Hall 1882; Onions 1904; Jespersen 1905 & 1956; Fowler 1908 & 1926; Curme 1927 and Partridge 1965) concur on the issue and, though they may not find the construction optimally elegant, they find no grammatically- or historically-motivated reason to avoid "splitting" an infinitive:

> The 'split' infinitive has taken such hold upon the consciences of journalists that, instead of warning the novice against splitting his infinitives, we must warn him against the curious superstition that the splitting or not splitting makes the difference between a good and a bad writer. (Fowler 1908)

> 'To' is no more an essential part of an infinitive than the definite article is an essential part of a nominative, and no one would think of calling 'the good man' a 'split nominative'. (Jespersen 1956: 144)

> …if it [the split infinitive] is the clearest and most natural construction, use it boldly. The angels are on our side. (Partridge 1965: 304)

In many reference books and popular texts, the prescriptive (or correctionist[11]) rule banning the split infinitive is usually bunched together with a number of other linguistic *faux pas* like ending a sentence with a preposition (*the rule which I am referring to*) or double negations (e.g. *you ain't seen nothing yet*). All these proscriptions are usually attributed to the first English grammars, written in the eighteenth century, and presumably modelled after Latin. The Bishop (and Oxford Professor) Robert Lowth in particular is mentioned quite often in this context, though there is actually no basis to blame him for the split-infinitive quandary since he never even mentions it in his influential *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* from 1762.[12]

So, clearly, the uproar is NOT, nor has ever been based in linguistic fact, it deals with the perceived shibboleths of good or "educated" writing. It is a seemingly monolithic prescription that merely states a rule without justifying it. It is not warranted based on the internal logic of English, nor has it any historical support, but this rule seems rather to derive from the predilections of a few early experts (starting perhaps with Alford 1866) who simply disliked the construction. What is remarkable about the rule is the frustrating circularity which perpetuates it; educated writers have avoided using it for fear that splitting an infinitive could make them seem unaware of the rule, thus reinforcing the idea that unsplit infinitives are the standard in educated writing.

Through the years, logic and common sense seem to have prevailed in the debate on split-infinitives and most usage books no longer advise

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[11] I use the term "correctionist" in the same sense as Batistella 2005, i.e. the "correctionist" view deems certain uses of non-standard English as incorrect and thus these forms need to be corrected to proper English. For all intents and purposes, it is synonymous with the term "prescriptivist" in this paper.

[12] Interestingly enough, the assertion that the rule against splitting an infinitive derives from a misguided comparison with Latin is also questionable—the earliest proscriptions do not actually argue the case based on Latin. According to Richard Bailey, the belief that Latin has inspired this "rule" is "part of the folklore of linguistics" (Bailey 2006).

against it (if it is discussed at all, it is typically deemed "awkward" rather than ungrammatical). The issue, however, was revived recently when another type of split verb construction (or, more specifically, an oddly placed adverbial) seemed to cause a linguistic stumble during the oath of office ceremony for President Barak Obama in the winter of 2009 (see also "Inauguration of Barak Obama" 2009).

The internet blogger and podcaster, Mignon Fogharty (a.k.a. *Grammar Girl*) took up the construction shortly after Obama's inauguration and Steven Pinker's commentary on the subject in the *New York Times* (Pinker 2009). Her blog covers the issues briefly and clearly does not condemn the split infinitive but rather she appears to embrace it. Some of the comments from her readers, however, still show an irrational skepticism toward the construction. Consider the comments from a visitor to the *Grammar Girl* site known as "John from Lorain", the relevant part of whose post begins with a comment on a previous post by "Andrea from Raleigh":

> Andrea from Raleigh writes: "Split infinitives ... have existed in the English language since at least the fourteenth century, and never has there been a rule against them." Andrea's own words contradict her. It should have been obvious to her that, if (as she claimed) there was a starting point for this barbarism, people had followed the rule against it up to that point! Now it is OUR turn to follow it. Grammar rules, including the two being discussed here, make for clearer communication and more pleasant reading. Andrea also wrote: "The superstition first began in the mid-nineteenth century ...". This is a sheer fiction, designed to twist readers' minds through the use of a false, but powerful, slur ("superstition"). The selective advocacy of barbarisms at this site (both by GG and other visitors) is symptomatic of the general slovenliness in the world today. There is a 20th/21st-Century laziness and lack of self-discipline that the greatest writers of prior centuries would have condemned. Let us learn from them not to be so sloppy and careless of our readers. Thank you. (Fogarty 2009)

These comments are admittedly extreme and perhaps not representative of the general discussion on the topic, but I have selected it to show that even the relatively harmless and fairly uncontroversial split infinitive can trigger emotions that readily draw on the deep-seated attitude that straying from the prescripted norms is a sign of decay. Consider now the following passage from Battistella (2005: 47) which gives some background to the so-called correctionist approach to grammar:

> Lowth's grammar was imitated and adapted in school grammars by Lindley Murray and others, and Murray's grammar, in turn, became widely used in America. […] Murray's approach also combined elements of the correctionist teaching method with aspects of moral education, helping to establish a tradition of promoting virtue, patriotism, and religion through grammar study. Following Murray, such American grammarians as Goold Brown and Samuel Kirkham set the pattern and tone of education with mass-produced grammars that also adopted a correctionist stance and treated the grammatical prescriptions of Lowth and others as already a matter of established tradition.

Note how J from L's comments above seem to be informed by the same "correctionist" attitudes that informed Murray, Lowth, Brown and Kirkham. If we understand that non-standard forms involve such culturally and morally charged issues for some speakers, it is easier to understand how the potentially influential power of non-standard language in Popular Culture can be perceived as decadent, threatening and harmful for society in general.

The funnest controversy ever

A grammar controversy that stirred up much fuss in 2008 is the use of the word (or, for some speakers, non-word) *funnest* in Apple's iPod advertisements from that year. The ad appeared in several versions featuring different images, all of which headed by the line: *Apple, the* **funnest** *iPod ever*.

The journey of *fun* from a noun to an adjective is a fairly recent phenomenon, and when it arrived in the territory of adjectives, it had some emotional baggage right from the start. Ben Zimmer, lexicographer and executive producer of the visual thesaurus (see "VisualThesaurus" n.d.), provides some historical background to the debate in his weblog from Oct 3, 2008:

> Why are reactions so strong against *funner* and *funnest*? Plain old *fun* has always gotten something of a bad rap: back in 1755, Samuel Johnson called it "a low cant word," meaning that it was jargon from the underworld. Over the centuries, the reputation of fun has been rehabilitated, but only as a noun. Many usage guides still state bluntly that fun is a noun and not an adjective. But it's a plain fact that fun has increasingly been treated as an adjective by modern English speakers, even among those who object to adding the comparative and superlative suffixes. (Zimmer 2008)

If we accept the fact that *fun* can be used as an adjective in present-day English, then it follows logically that it should, at least in theory, be possible to apply the same principles to it as one applies to other adjectives. Put briefly and ignoring the spelling details that can influence the choice of comparative and superlative constructions, typical adjectives follow the pattern below (see Quirk et al 1985: 461-62; Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1122-1170 for a comprehensive discussion):

Table 1: Comparative and Superlative forms of Typical Adjectives

	'Rule'	**Comparative & Superlatives**
One syllable: e.g. *large, strong, cold*	Add *-er*/*-est*	*larger/largest, stronger/strongest, colder/coldest*
Two syllables, e.g. *angry, narrow, stupid*	Forms vary based on spelling and/or rhythmic concerns	*angrier/angriest/* or *more/most angry* *narrower/narrowest* or *more/most narrow* *stupider/stupidest* or *more/most stupid*
Three syllables (+) e.g. *generous, important, intelligent*	Use *more/ most*	*more/most generous, more/most important, more/most intelligent*

As can be seen from the Table 1, two syllable adjectives are special since there are different (and usually predictable) factors affecting the choice of comparative forms. It should be noted too that some monosyllabic adjectives can even take the *more*/*most* forms (such as the word *grim* in *[...]the situation for the Somali government, which was fragile at best, is looking even **more grim***) given the right context. Otherwise the pattern is fairly straightforward for monosyllabic, gradable adjectives.[13]

[13] There a few notable exceptions to the one syllable rule with adjectives like *real*, *right*, or *wrong* which have a lot in common with ungradable adjectives like *absolute*, *closed*, *dead*, etc., in that they seem to have a limited range of scale. One can say, for example "*more right than wrong*" (or vice versa), but one could hardly say "*the most right/wrong solution*". Comparisons of the type "more X than X" are possible even with the most stubbornly non-gradable adjectives, *cf* "*more silk than polyester*". Regardless of the special rules that

Consider below some of the reactions to the word forms *funner* and *funnest* garnered on different internet language forums:

> Sorry, Ben, I refuse to allow advertising to dictate the evolution of the language. Should we also accept "like" as in "Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should?" Bad manners may become the norm, but they will always evidence rudeness and ignorance. The same can be said for grammar. Patrick B. (Marquette, MI)
>
> (Zimmer 2008)

> Funnest is not a word. Neither is funner. It's 'more fun' and 'most fun.' Some words do not take the -er or -est endings. Another one is 'important.' You wouldn't say "She is importanter than him." You just have to remember when to use each one. There's not always a works-every-time, black and white rule for grammar. In fact there usually isn't! (Fogarty 2008)

These views, in particular the first, exemplify once again the belief that a language innovation from Popular Culture is inherently bad or wrong, *funner* and *funnest* cannot be considered words because advertisers have "invented" them (which, as we shall see below, is not true). Note also the reference to the Winston ad campaign, which further highlights how stubbornly entrenched the idea is that commercial/popular forces are responsible for corrupting the language. The second comment, moreover, shows how a misunderstanding of how the inflectional system works can lead to claims that are illogical and grammatically unsupported. The obvious reason that the adjective *important* does not take the *–er/est* inflections is because it is a three-syllable word; *fun* is a one syllable word and therefore using *more* and *most* to modify it would make it an exception to an otherwise uniform system.

Grammar Girl ends her internet column with the following words "I predict the 'funnest iPod ever' campaign will increase the general use of 'funnest' and could even push it into the informal usage category. Now that's power" (Fogarty 2008).

Using the 400+ million word Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008), I searched for occurrences of *funner* and *funnest* to see if it is possible to say anything about the forms and their usage

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apply to ungradable adjectives, *fun* must certainly be considered to be gradable and therefore compliant with the normal rules of comparative forms.

based on empirical, verifiable evidence. The bar chart below shows that the words *funner/funnest* were already in existence in the early 1990s:

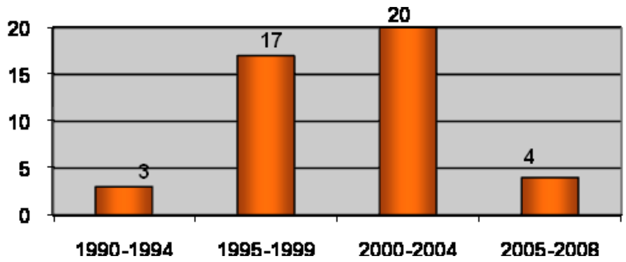

Figure 1: Occurrences of *funner* and *funnest* in the COCA corpus

Though the occurrences are too low for the above illustration to be statistically significant, we can derive at least one clear conclusion: the usage was clearly not invented by Steve Jobs or iPod's advertisers since *funnest* first occurs in the corpus in 1991 (*We shop around more and know more about the prices before buying. It used to be buying clothes was one of the* ***funnest*** *things in the world now it's more a necessity*. Ellen Neuborn 1991, *USA Today*) and it is reasonable to believe that there are examples which should pre-date even that one. Additionally, despite the fact that there are not all that many examples in COCA, Figure 1 also demonstrates that the occurrences of *funner* and *funnest* dropped in the corpus right around the time of the iPod ad; i.e. its usage appears to have been on the decline by the time of the ad campaign in question. It is too early to tell if the iPod ads will have an effect on speakers and thus boost the use of these comparative forms; only when the corpus statistics are available for the period of 2009 and after will we know for sure if *Grammar Girl*'s prediction is correct.

Maybe it's just funner to be provocative?

As was the case with the Winston cigarette jingle above, the provocative use of language can cause a commotion (intentional or otherwise) which in turn can create greater exposure for a product. For that reason, it seems reasonable to assume that admen may be tempted to break the rules of English simply for an attention-grabbing effect. Returning now for a moment to the use of *like* as a conjunction in the example of the controversial Winston ad which introduced this study, we can once again see that the admen did not create the "aberrant" usage. *The Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* provides a useful sketch of the history of conjunctive *like*, citing examples from as early as the fourteenth century, but also states that it did not become particularly common until the nineteenth century (see the dictionary entry for *like* in *The Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*, 1989). Since Winston did not introduce the construction, the question then is, could the Winston ad have affected usage positively? Consider now Figure 2 below which is based on searches from the "extended" Brown Family of Corpora[14]:

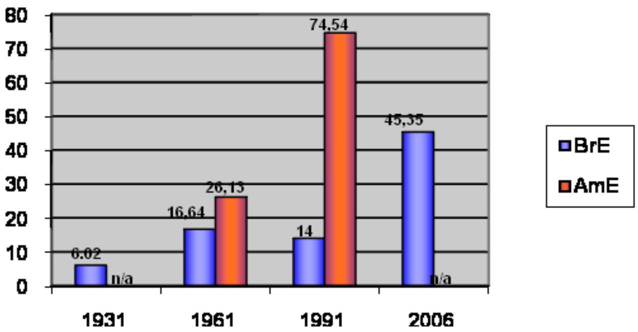

Figure 2: The use of *like* as a conjunction over time (BrE & AmE treated separately)

The numbers in Figure 2 are to be understood as normalized frequencies per million words of text, i.e. in 1931 conjunctive *like* occurred 6.02 times per one million words of text in the BLOB corpus (here this represents a mere 7 occurrences). There is no American equivalent to the BLOB corpus yet, so no comparison is possible for texts from 1931. However, in 1961, there is a clear trend; American English appears to favor the construction more than British (30 hits in Brown vs. only 19 in LOB) and that trend continues in the 1991 subcorpora, with the difference that the usage increased in Frown (86 hits) but more or less

[14] The specific corpora used here were the Brown, LOB, Frown, FLOB, the pre-LOB (or BLOB) and the BE2006 corpora.

remained stable in FLOB (only 16 hits). This increase in conjunctive *like* in the American corpora on its own cannot conclusively prove that the Winston ad had any effect, but it is consistent with the idea that the ad could have been a factor in the increased use of conjunctive *like* in AmE. Another interesting speculation is that the increased use of this construction in BrE in the 2006 subcorpus could be due to the influence of AmE on BrE. Though there is no corresponding 2006 American subcorpus in the Brown family, a quick comparison with the COCA corpus shows that in the period 2004-2008, conjunctive *like* has a normalized frequency of 106.1 per million words, in other words the increase in use has presumably continued (roughly a 41% increase), but it is not as drastic in the material as it is between 1961 and 1991 (a 188% increase).

Are classic authors more better as a model?

In much of the lay discussion on language (as well as among some of the so-called experts), there is a sense of moral panic concerning the decay of the language encountered in Popular Culture. As was noted earlier in the discussion of the Winston ad, *The Chicago Daily News* decried the use of *like* as a conjunction and took the acceptance of this usage as “a general decay in values in society”. It is also obvious from blog excerpts above that, among some, there is a sense that controversial usage, though it may be well-documented and historically defensible, are still somehow looked upon with dismay as signs of ignorance, laziness and moral complacency (for detailed treatments of this subject, see Aitchison 1991 and Battistella 2005).

For the purpose of illustrating how this opinion still exists and how it can sometimes be voiced today, I have selected the text below, taken from the *Daily Mail* columnist Peter Hitchens’s weblog from November 29, 2006:

> I really do grow weary of the people who say ‘language will always change, there’s nothing you can do about it’. It’s simply not true, and this is a wretched excuse for moral and practical laziness. People speak and write of their own free will. If they think a word or an expression is ugly, or vague, or ambiguous, they can decline to use it.

Hitchens then continues by appealing to an appreciation of the "classic" authors of the English canon:

> […] I'm certain that Shakespeare, by clothing certain thoughts in majestic language, enriched the way that all Englishmen speak, for as long as his work was taught and appreciated.
>
> I'm equally certain that the shrinking knowledge of Shakespeare, Dickens, Tennyson. [sic] Keats and the other great poets has impoverished our language and made it thinner and less honest.

In the next few lines, he goes on to comment, in both good and bad terms, on American English, which he follows with a plea for people to read Orwell's famous essay *Politics and the English Language* (Orwell 1946).[15] He then concludes his blog with the paragraph below:

> They [changes for the worse] destroy subtlety, narrow meanings and gradually reduce a musical and intricate tongue to a series of utilitarian grunts, splutters and yells. It's our duty, to those who come after us, to resist this, not complacently to insist that it is inevitable. The beauty and subtlety of language are both measures of a civilisation. If we willingly let them disappear, then we should not be surprised at the new dark age [sic] that follows.

Again, echoes from eighteenth century correctionists like Sheridan, Lowth and Murray are evident in the ideas that language change is a result of "moral and practical laziness" and that "a new Dark Age" awaits us if we are not careful.

In the light of the "moral panic" of the kind expressed above, and his appeal for us to read his selection of canonized writers, it is relevant to look at the acclaimed authors mentioned, those who are explicitly said to enrich English and those whose works one should study in a way to improve one's language. Though it would be illuminating to illustrate usages from many different authors, for a more concise examination, I consider only Shakespeare (all the examples below were taken from Alden 1925 and it should be mentioned that his collection of examples is far more extensive than the one presented here):

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[15] See Pullum (2008) for an interesting critique on Orwell's essay.

Shakespeare often substituted one word class with another, altering the grammar of the verb idiosyncratically:

-- In the dark **backward** and abysm of time. *Temp*., I, ii, 50
-- That may repeat and **history** his loss. *2 H 4*, IV, i, 203
-- This day shall **gentle** his condition. *H 5*, IV, iii, 63
-- **Grace** me no grace, nor **uncle** me no uncle. *R 2*, II, iii, 87
-- My death's sad tale may yet **undeaf** his ear. *R 2*, II, i, 16

Pronouns in Shakespeare's writing often have the "wrong" form, subject forms are repeatedly used instead of the object forms:

-- And **he** (= *him*) my husband best of all affects. *M.W.W.*, IV, iv, 87
-- Yes, you may have seen Cassio and **she** together. *Oth.*, IV, ii, 3
-- Making night hideous, and **we** fools of nature/So horridly to shake our disposition. *Haml.*, I, iv, 54
-- Pray you, **who** does the wolf love? *Cor.*, II, i, 8

Subject verb agreement is sometimes incorrect or awkward:

-- These high wild hills and rough uneven ways/**Draws** out our miles, and makes them wearisome. *R 2*, II, iii, 4-5
-- Their encounters… **hath** been royally attorneyed. *W.T.*, I, i, 28
-- Three parts of him **Is** ours already . *J.C.*, I, iii, 154-55

Relative pronouns in subject positions are often omitted, a usage which is generally condemned as substandard in present-day English:

-- I have a **brother is** condemn'd to die. *M. for M.*, II, ii, 34
-- Besides, our nearness to the King in love
Is near the hate of **those love** not the King. *R 2*, II, ii, 129

Double-negatives and multiple comparatives, which are also stigmatized in PdE, are not unusual in Shakespeare:

-- I **cannot** go **no** further. *A.Y.L*, II, iv
-- And that **no** woman has, nor **never none**,
Shall mistress be of it, save I alone. *T.N.*, III, I
-- And his **more braver** daughter could control thee. *Temp.*, I, ii, 439
-- With the **most boldest** and best hearts of Rome. *J.C.*, II, i, 121

By using the above examples, I emphatically do not mean to criticize Shakespeare's writing or characterize it as inferior, sloppy or error-ridden. I list the examples above to show: 1) that even though Shakespeare is sometimes referred to as a model to aspire to, the language in his works often exhibits exactly those features that the traditionalists and correctionists dislike and 2) that studying Shakespeare exposes the reader to many of the same deviant constructions that one would encounter in Popular Culture, yet there is no fear that exposure to Shakespeare's writing will taint the reader or cause him/her to use constructions which violate present-day prescriptions. A noteworthy parallelism in this context is that the nature of Shakespeare's dialogs makes them require a feeling of a credible, natural conversation (cf. Battistella 2005: 34), just as much of the language of Popular Culture also requires.

I can only conclude here that it is the symbolic capital which is tied to Shakespeare and the other authors of the canon[16] that allows this contradiction to make sense; if Shakespeare's usage shifts and grammar idiosyncrasies can be taught/understood in context without corrupting the reader, it should be possible to do so with the language of Popular Culture. In this way, the language of Popular Culture can be used as a tool to engage the reader in a dialog about what is correct, grammatical, elegant, etc., and what are the pressures and background issues that can help explain questionable uses, put them in perspective and allow the reader to make an informed decision on the matter.

Factors which confound the issue

As a way of moving toward the conclusion of the essay, I now summarize some of the relevant factors which contribute to and exacerbate controversies over language use.

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[16] *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage,* under headings such as "double negative", "double comparative", "like", "split infinitive", "ain't", etc, give illustrative examples of many famous authors and orators such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Jane Austen, Winston Churchill, etc., who violate prescriptive norms.

Many reference works (Trudgill 1999; Bex & Watts 1999; Crowley 2003 and Crystal 2006, to name just a few) which take up the issue of so-called "Standard English" note that, unlike many other languages, there is no central authority or governing academy for the English Language. Because there is no established, recognized agency on matters of usage, some people, especially those inclined to traditional prescription, tend to take specific reference works and well-regarded authors as authoritative. The problem with this, of course, is which reference works and which authors should be seen as the "correct" ones? It is apparent from many discussions cited in this study as well as in common usage reference works that older and/or more well established constructions are considered to be the gold standard for usage issues. Even when this approach is applied with care it is problematic since traditions are often inconsistent, ambiguous or at odds with each other.

Other people, relativists in particular, tend to argue "whatever is is right" and thus correctness for them is defined by usage. This attitude, if it is applied indiscriminately, has many disadvantages as well, since most usage, standard or otherwise, is situated in real life situations which must be understood in context.

As many of the above mentioned controversies show, it can be difficult to reconcile the traditional and relativist standpoints for a more subtle, balanced and commonsense approach. Sometimes judgments are flawed due to general misunderstandings about how grammar works (as was demonstrated in the case of *funner/funnest*), or vexed because of the belief that a specific construction has been introduced for commercial reasons and should therefore be treated with suspicion.

Conclusion

In this brief examination of controversial English grammar in Popular Culture, I have shown that Popular Culture can be an important resource in studying English. At the same time as it reflects usage, it can also inform us on cultural and social issues that not only lie behind usage, but also help us to understand the ideological standpoints from which usage is disputed.

I have also made a case that controversial usages may have an effect on real life linguistic behavior and at the very least they can signal a change in progress. In the examples I discussed, these changes were not completely new, but the Popular Culture usage may have accelerated more widespread use.

Finally I have illustrated that there is underlying "fear" of the language of Popular Culture simply because it is Popular Culture; it is commonly viewed as a reflection of bad character and poor education and as such it does not typically possess (and cannot typically transfer onto a speaker) the symbolic and cultural capital connected with the dominant ideology.[17] This may be based on a belief that such usages are only associated with short-lived trends, commercial interests or poorly educated and incompetent speakers. This view is harmful in that it inhibits a better understanding of the language that surrounds us on an everyday basis and how it affects us; it rejects and trivializes its usefulness in understanding historical developments, stylistic variation, multicultural diversity, and linguistic identity, among other things.

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[17] This is not to say that it does NOT reinforce the dominant ideology, which is a fascinating topic of study, but an altogether different issue then the relevant one here.

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Eating ‘Local’: The Politics of Post-Statehood Hawaiian Cookbooks

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In the last twenty years there has been an emergence of scholarship examining cookbooks as cultural texts that engage in a complex set of functions including the building of community (Bower 1997), communication of cultural and gender norms (Neuhaus 2003), preservation of a record of foods practices (Miller 1998), and the preservation of women’s biographical record (Theophano 2002). This scholarship allows us to understand that cookbooks do significantly more than coordinate the production of food—cookbooks are also important everyday texts that reflect and reproduce the socio-political milieu in which the text is created.

It is an understanding of cookbooks as texts of understated importance that under-girds my interest in cookbooks produced in and about Hawaiian culture and food in the post-World War II era. In this essay I will be looking at two cookbooks—*Hawaiian Cuisine* (1963) published by the Hawai’i State Society, and *The Hawaii Cookbook and Backyard Luau* (1964) by Elizabeth Ahn Toupin—that were written by “local”[1] Hawaiians about Hawaiian food, and published during the height of the U.S. “luau-craze” of the 1960s. These cookbooks take up and amend the discourse of Hawaiian food made visible in popular, serialized texts of the era including the *Betty Crocker* and *Better Homes and Gardens* series.

Perhaps what makes these books most interesting is that the key individuals involved in the production of the texts were, twenty years prior, grassroots activists involved in the democratic revolution of

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[1] In Hawaiian pidgin—or the island vernacular—*local* refers to a person born and raised on the Islands. This is not an un-contested term; it has been suggested by Native Hawaiian activist and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask that an appropriate term for islanders of Asian descent is *Asian settlers*.

Hawaiian politics. Tracing the evolution from grassroots activism to cookbook publishing allows for a reading of the cookbooks within a lineage of activism; reading against the idea that writing cookbooks is a comfortable bourgeois pastime indicative of a "selling out" of earlier political ideals, I will be looking at the ways that these two cookbooks continue the political work of the post-war/pre-statehood period (1945-1959). Indeed, I will argue that these cookbooks can be understood by what Mary Louise Pratt describes as *autoethnographic* texts: "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (471). The two cookbooks I am reading here create complex representations that work, at least in part, to redress the mis-representations made by the dominant (read: mainland U.S., white) culture.

Hawaiian statehood and grassroots activism

Grassroots activism and the creation of an interracial democratic coalition were at the heart of the success of the Hawaiian Statehood movement. While the possibility of Hawaiian statehood had existed as an idea since the annexation of Hawai'i in 1898, it was a set of events and shifting cultural paradigms in the mid-twentieth century that most significantly contributed to the ultimate success of the much-contested Hawaiian statehood movement. The bombing of Pearl Harbor, the creation of the all-Japanese American 442nd combat unit, and the contestation over Japanese-American citizenship after Pearl Harbor all contributed significantly to the political and cultural shifts that took place on the Islands during and after World War II.[2] It was grassroots activism and a newly-empowered non-white electorate that eventually led to the overthrow of the long-standing *haole* (or, white)-led Republican party domination of Hawai'i (Fuchs 1961).

In his 1967 biography *Journey to Washington,* longtime Hawaiian Senator Daniel K. Inouye describes a conversation with a fellow wounded Nisei veteran as they were recuperating immediately after the

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[2] The 442nd regiment was a segregated all-Japanese American combat unit that fought in Europe. Military service was, for many who served, an alternative to internment. The unit was the most highly decorated in U.S. history.

war's end. The friend expresses his disgruntlement with the racial hierarchy in Hawai'i and laments the fact that, despite their status as highly decorated veterans of the famed all-Japanese American 442nd regiment, they were still systematically discriminated against on the basis of race. Using this conversation to demonstrate the growing intolerance of racial exclusion on the Islands and within the broader nation, Inouye quotes his friend as saying:

> We ought to have every single right that every single other American has! Man, we shed a lot of blood in this war. What was that all about? Was it all wasted? Dan, I'm not looking to put the blame on anybody. I don't even really care about all that stuff that happened before. What I'm interested in is tomorrow. I want my kid to have every break. I demand it! (1967: 190)

The above conversation highlights both a sense of heightened frustration *and* a glimmer of hope for the possibility of revolutionizing the Hawaiian political scene. The conversation between two wounded veterans articulates an argument for statehood and full political recognition by way of their wartime service. The fact that they "shed a lot of blood in this war," according to Inouye, is a compelling reason for equality and belonging; the figure of the soldier works to ratify the previously-questioned patriotism of the Japanese American.

Inouye makes visible an important link between the experiences and frustrations of the Nisei soldier and the post-war statehood movement. And while the Nisei experience is central to understanding postwar Hawaiian politics (Japanese Americans comprised approximately 37% of Hawai'i's population in the period between 1940-1950), it is nonetheless an admittedly narrow perspective to focus the discussion of the exigencies of statehood to the Japanese American experience.[3]

Supplemental to understanding the success of the Nisei veterans' claim to full citizenship is an understanding of the Hawaiian Islands' long history of racial hierarchy. Included in this history is the colonization of native Hawaiian land by European explorers, the migration of Asian plantation labor, and the arrival of missionaries of

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[3] I suggest Lawrence Fuch's *Hawai'i Pono* for a rich discussion of the island politics during this period.

European descent; these vectors converged to create a multi-racial society that was, for generations, ruled by the wealthy land-owning white elites. The *haole* ruling class, a privileged minority, was sustained by a colonial plantation system that relied on the systematic economic and political disempowerment of all people of color. As Ron Takaki recalls in *A Different Mirror* (1993), the nineteenth century plantation system in Hawai'i intentionally and carefully promoted importing laborers from various nations (and language groups) as a way of preventing labor strikes (252). The labor tyranny began to crumble in the 1920s and 30s when several successful unionization campaigns launched a direct assault against the hegemony of the ruling class. The successful unionization of Island labor contributed to the production of a post-war territory ripe with interest in political change.

Bolstered by the labor movement that had been gaining power in the last decades, the postwar period in Hawai'i saw a newly-empowered student movement at the University of Hawai'i. By 1948 Dan Inouye was a senior at the University, and he became a well-regarded student leader. While at the "U of H" he met Elizabeth Toupin, a graduate student in the Economics department who also took an active role in the political work that led to the re-emergence of the Democratic Party in Hawai'i. Toupin, a Hawaiian-born Korean-American woman, became the campaign manager for Allan Saunders.

Saunders, chair of the political science department, was a candidate for delegate for the Constitutional Convention of 1948—a critical part of the statehood movement. Both Toupin and Inouye were actively involved in campaigning for delegates for the convention. While the grassroots work came out of the academic community of the university, it extended to the streets (and doorsteps) of the greater Honolulu community. Elizabeth Toupin recalls this time:

> The scent of true democracy was everywhere and when I was appointed a graduate assistant at the University of Hawaii, I was part of the change […]. There was a move (again) for Hawaiian statehood, in 1948 but this time it was different. Instead of waiting for the U.S. Congress to pass a bill extending statehood to Hawaii, [we] took the initiative and set up a Constitutional Convention to write a state constitution for Hawaii […] it was then to be submitted to U.S. Congress for acceptance. While I was a TA in economics department, I was close to the head of the political science department, Allan Saunders […] so when he mentioned an interest running for one of the delegate positions in the constitutional convention, I said "I'd like to be your campaign manager" […] and he thought it was great. My boss, the head of the

> Economics Dept., Dr. Harry Roberts decided also to run so we formed a Committee with Alan's TA Ralph Miwa and Dan Inouye. Dan was a senior and very active in the renewed Democratic party. It worked. (Toupin 2009, email)

The campaign season of 1948—fraught with the Republican attack on the Democratic Party as Communist-led—produced a complex campaign in which the Democrats had to work diligently to establish credibility among island constituents. Toupin, Inouye, and their political colleagues were part of a vigorous and successful door-to-door campaign in Honolulu's 4th district.

While it is far beyond the scope of this paper to recount the complexities of the subsequent decade of the Democratic party's rise to power and the long-waged battle for statehood, it is important to acknowledge that the above-mentioned roots of statehood were marked not by radicalism, but by a centrist argument for inclusion that led to the ultimate 1959 success of the statehood campaign. Inouye, Toupin and their co-collaborators were arguing for empowerment and recognition by way of the U.S. electoral political system. And Inouye's early and steady rise from Island politics to the rank of U.S. Senator demonstrates the very insider-nature of this claim.

Once statehood was achieved in 1959, Dan Inouye quickly moved from territory politician to U.S. Representative (1959-1963) to U.S. Senator (1963-present). For Inouye and all individuals involved in the process of statehood, as well as for the territory-cum-state itself, it became necessary to make the transition from the politics of the statehood movement to "state politics." The transition was made at a time of a significant mainland fascination with the culture and climate of the Hawaiian Islands. While the representation of Hawai'i-as-exotic must be understood within a context of white hegemony and the exoticization of the non-white other, it is also a phenomenon that worked to promote a booming tourist economy. The role of tourism in post-statehood Hawai'i worked to diversify the Hawaiian economy beyond sugar and pineapple production, and tourism also helped circulate an understanding of the culture and peoples of Hawai'i on the U.S. mainland. During this period both Daniel Inouye and Elizabeth Toupin became involved in the writing and promotion of cookbooks about Hawaiian food; these texts contribute significantly to the education of non-islanders about the racial and ethnic identities of the people of Hawai'i.

Mainland luaus: the dominant representation

In order to better understand the contribution made by *Hawaiian Cuisine* and *Hawaii Cookbook*, it is important to provide an illustration of the popular, serialized texts against which I will read the two locally-produced books. By the 1960s it was common for cookbooks to have a section dedicated to the Hawaiian luau. “Luau” became synonymous for “Hawaiian food” and was, in fact, almost the exclusive mode in which the food of Hawai’i was represented during the period.[4]

The luau presented in *Betty Crocker’s New Outdoor Cookbook* is representative of the many luaus offered in Cold War cookbooks. The popularity of the luau is evident in the ubiquity of “backyard luaus” as practiced across the nation:

> By the late fifties nearly every middle-class American suburban home with a patio had become a site of unsophisticated luaus; and to the average (non-gourmet) housewife, “Polynesian Cooking” had become little more than a synonym for dumping chunks of pineapple, banana, and maraschino cherries on otherwise humdrum food. (Stern 1988: 56)

The “tiki fad”[5] had hit the mainland with fury, and access to information on how to throw a luau in your own suburban backyard was widely available in a range of often cheap, poorly-edited, often serialized cookbooks.

Betty Crocker’s Outdoor Cookbook was published in 1967 by the General Mills Corporation. The cookbook begins the way all Betty Crocker’s texts do—with a note from “Betty”.[6] In her welcome note, Betty writes that there is nothing quite like the “change-of-pace pleasure of cooking and eating outdoors” (4). The *Outdoor Cookbook’s* luau offering is found in a chapter entitled “Patio Parties – with a Cross-

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[4] The luau is a Hawaiian feast and special occasion. To generalize it as representative of all Hawaiian food is clearly a mis-representation.

[5] While *tiki* refers specifically to wooden carvings of human figures common in Polynesian culture, in mid-twentieth century U.S. vernacular the term became a way to generally connote Polynesian-ness (e.g. tiki torches, tiki lounge, etc.).

[6] Betty Crocker is a fictionalized masthead adopted by General Mills to sell flour in the 1920s. The introductory note from Betty is a tradition that began with the publication of the earliest *Betty Crocker* recipes and cookbooks in the 1940s.

country Flair" with an explanation that parties that choose a regional, American theme are particularly fun (1967: 100). To add to this, the setting for the luau is explained:

> What about treating your guests to the Hawaiian Luau? Have the man of the hour wear his splashiest sportshirt and say "Aloha" to each guest with a paper lei. Perhaps you'll even ask all of the women to wear muumuu-style dresses. (1967: 100)

Despite the apparent enthusiasm for taking up a Hawaiian theme, the luau suggested here has a very basic, stripped-down presentation. The luau features the minimalist title "Hawaiian luau" indicating, perhaps, what Jane and Michael Stern refer to as the tiredness of the luau by the end of the 1960s (56). The recipes offered in this simple luau include: *'Pig' Roasted on the Turnspit, Teriyaki Steak, Sweet Potatoes with Coconut, Chinese Peas, Tahitian Salad, and Aloha Baked Pineapple* (110). The lack of explanation about how these diverse recipes would come to rest on the same "luau" table implies that the reader is familiar with or receptive to the idea of "Hawaiian" as a vague amalgam of "oriental" culture.

The photograph accompanying this luau is a two-page wide close-up image of a buffet table. On the table is a faux luau pig, a salad in an enormous clam shell, decorated drinks, and a lot of foliage. The pig is an important component of this feast as it is a self-conscious parodying of a more genuine luau pig. Instead of a traditional luau pig (which would be roasted in an underground *Imu* for several days) this "pig" is a ham with raisin eyes and carrot ears. The photograph also includes small statues, bamboo, coconut and wicker, which, taken together, become signifiers of native "Hawaiian" culture and tradition. These objects within the photographs enact this signification by calling on a vague sense of the primitive and the unusual.

In keeping with the norm, the *Betty Crocker New Outdoor Cookbook*'s luau is short and sweet. It is aimed at fulfilling Betty Crocker's "change-of-pace pleasure" while simultaneously promising ease and foods that are not-too-unusual.[7] The popular cookbooks against

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[7] Cookbooks of this period frequently engage in a discourse of how to handle difference. In the 1963 *Better Homes Best Buffets* the authors explain in the

which I am reading *Hawaiian Cuisine* and *The Hawai'i Cookbook and Backyard Luau* evacuate detail and historical specificity from their texts while presenting the luau as both simple and exotic. It is the specificity of the treatment of cultural identity that makes *The Hawaii Cookbook and Backyard Luau* remarkable. Both books are careful to explain, in some detail, the history of the people of the Hawaiian Islands while also providing a range of recipes—far beyond the chow mien and faux luau pig—available in most cookbooks of the era.

Hawaiian Cuisine: the Statehood Society cookbook

Once he had achieved a position in national politics, first as Congressman and then Senator, Dan Inouye found himself at the helm of many vigorous PR campaigns to promote Hawai'i and Hawaiian tourism. Inouye chaired the committee that authorized the 1963 publication of *Hawaiian Cuisine*, a cookbook dedicated to the multi-ethnic food of the Islands.

The cover of *Hawaiian Cuisine* lists the ethnic groups included in the book: "Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese, Korean and Cosmopolitan" (I will discuss the function of the ambiguous category of "Cosmopolitan" below). The preface to the cookbook reminds the reader that Hawai'i is a racially diverse state:

> Hawaii, our 50th State, is known as the "Melting Pot of the Pacific" consisting of many nationalities who brought with them their traditions and cultures. The recipes collected and compiled in this edition are derived from menus typical of racial groups in Hawaii. *This book is presented to those who are away from Hawaii* so that they may bring into their homes the dishes that are loved by all.
>
> (1969: 3; emphasis mine)

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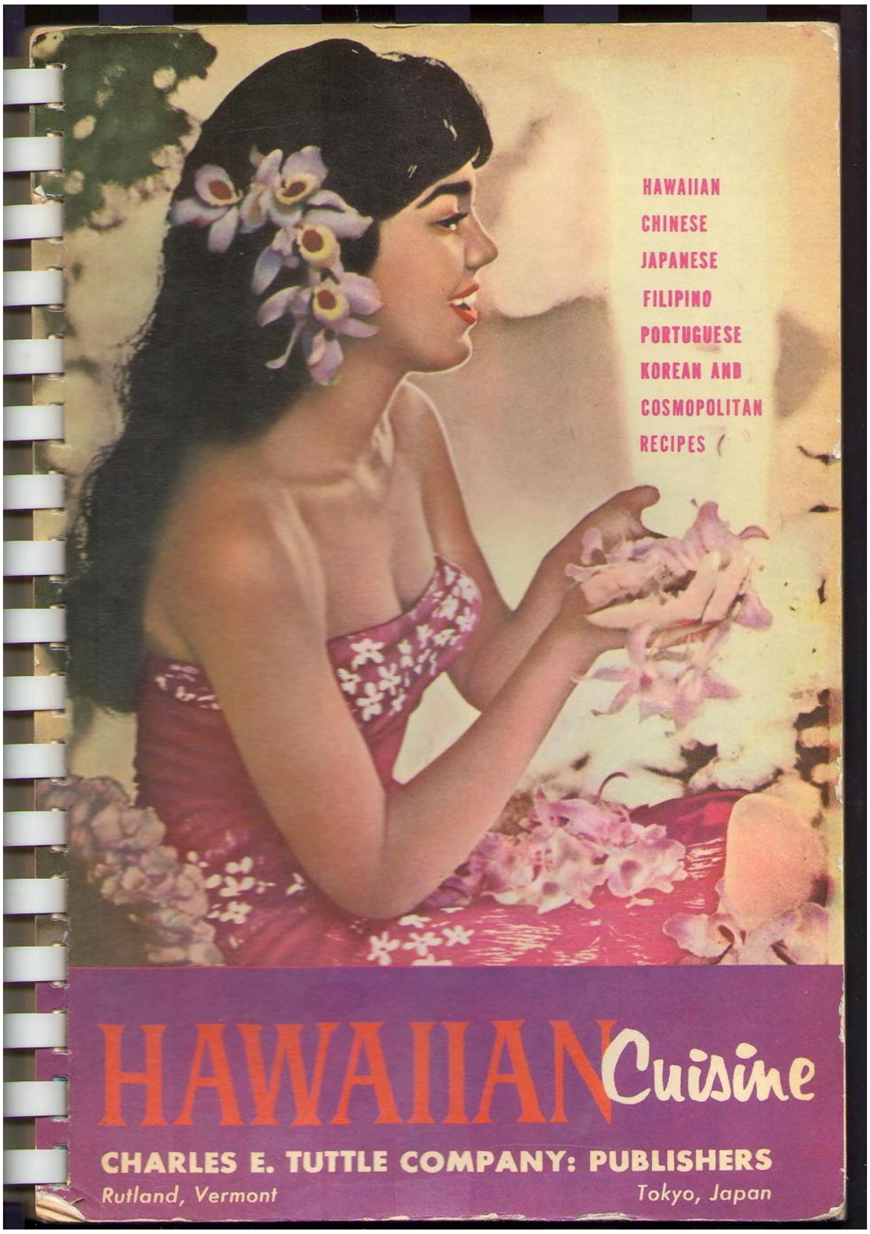
introduction "As a rule, men like simple food while women take to 'something different'" (1963: 7).



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The ambiguous dedication to "those who are away from Hawaii" signifies a diaspora of Hawaiian-born peoples who have moved to the mainland and elsewhere; at the same time, "those who are away" also interpolates those who visit (or would like to visit) Hawai'i as tourists. On the page following the preface is found a foreword that acts as a more personalized welcome from the Senators and Congressmen, including brand new Senator Daniel K. Inouye. The foreword, as the voice of the politicians, explains that the appeal of such a text is the spirit of Aloha: "If there is any dominant characteristic of the people of Hawaii it is the spirit of ALOHA. A part of this spirit is the enjoyment of the foods prepared by the various races living in the 50th State" (4). Hawai'i is constructed as a welcoming state—available and accessible to the reader.

The preface and foreword clearly introduce Hawai'i within a context of multi-racial and multi-cultural blending, and yet the book itself is set up in a way that very carefully maintains the border and boundaries between these ethnic groups. The ambiguously named "Cosmopolitan" section is the only chapter of the book in which various ethnic foods meet and mingle. Indeed, it seems as though this section of the book reflects not only multi-ethnic eating, but also the inter-racial families that had become a significant part of the state's demographic by the mid twentieth century.[8]

The recipe section of *Hawaiian Cuisine* begins with the Hawaiian chapter, and the chapter is prefaced with a photograph of a woman wearing a lei and bearing a very large platter of fruit; on the opposing page is a black and white drawing of several shirtless men in an outrigger canoe. Before we are provided with any actual recipes, we are presented with a six-page article entitled "So You Want to Give a Luau". Notably, this title is a statement, not a question. While this article title is remarkably similar to many of the luau sections found in mainland cookbooks, the information provided within is very different—and much more detailed—than what is found in texts such as the *Better Homes and Gardens* luau discussed earlier. This article includes information on how

[8] It is noteworthy that the table of contents parenthetically explains that the Cosmopolitan section includes Portuguese food. Per the careful blending of plantation labor noted by historian Ron Takaki, the Portugese were brought to the island to work as plantation overseers, or *lunas*.

to dress “Hawaiian style,” how to make a muumuu, how to slice a pineapple, and even instructions for building an Imu (underground oven for pig roasting) in your own backyard. The article concludes with an example of a typical luau menu. Following the menu is an explanation that it is “appropriate” to substitute dishes from other sections of the cookbook in the luau menu, “[l]ong rice with chicken (in the Japanese section) is another dish popular at luaus. Coconut cake or coconut ice cream desserts are perfectly acceptable at any luau” (1969: 14).

There are only three and a half pages of actual recipes in the Hawaiian section, and all are geared towards throwing a luau for 8-10 guests. The recipes all begin with the ingredients list and are followed by a brief paragraph, all of which are purely instructional. The one exception to this is the Lomi Lomi Salmon recipe, which begins with the following sentence: “This Hawaiian fish salad is described by natives as ONO (delicious)” (16). The description implies that the reader is not familiar with Hawaiian language and needs explanation of native words; simultaneously, the use of narrative voice and the third person leads us to understand that the writer speaks for, but is not, “native”, creating an important textual distance from the indigenous population of the Islands.

The Chinese chapter begins with a drawing of a scroll with a Chinese ideograph—the translation provided below reads threateningly, “[e]at, don’t talk!” (19). The subsequent page includes a five paragraph overview of Chinese cooking in Hawai’i, explaining that all Hawaiian hostesses have a favorite Chinese dish they like to cook for “an old friend, whose cultivated palate appreciates something different” (1969: 20). This observation is then followed by the history of Chinese migration to the Islands beginning in the early 1800s. This introduction explains that “[e]ventually the offspring of these (plantation) laborers, because of their aggressiveness and intelligence fortified with the American education they acquired, became the merchants, laundry owners, restaurateurs, professional men and financial leaders of Hawaii” (1969: 20). While no background information (let alone reference to their intelligence) is provided about the history of native Hawaiians on the islands, the *Hawaiian Cuisine* cookbook finds it important and necessary to locate the Chinese within a history of migration and labor.

The Chinese recipes, as with many of the recipes throughout all sections of this cookbook, are presented with two titles. The Chinese name of the dish is accompanied with a parenthetical translation and/or explanation. For instance, the Chinese recipe for "Guy Choy Yuke" is described as "Chinese Mustard Greens with Beef" (1969: 29). The use of the parenthetical is far less extensive here than in the sections that follow, and seems to be limited to the English translation of Chinese words. The food offered in the Chinese section is expansive and includes 24 recipes for a variety of dishes ranging from almond cookies to pickled pigs feet. Despite the earlier contextualization of Chinese food as "something different" there is also a textual implication that Chinese food is (already) highly popular and familiar, and therefore, good to serve on "days when a haole guest comes from the mainland" (1969: 20).[9]

To further elaborate on *Hawaiian Cuisine's* theme of distinctiveness—yet cross-cultural culinary sharing—the Japanese chapter begins with a narrative of a "likely scene" in which a Native Hawaiian plantation worker takes interest in Sato-san's lunch. The conversation between Sato-san and Kalani begins with a suspicious curiosity and ends with Kalani asking to try Sato-san's *nori*. Subsequent to the dialog between Kalani and Sato-san is a contextualization of this as a formative scene:

> This must have been the scene repeated many times during the early years of the Japanese in Hawaii. Sampling a bit of Japanese food started as simply as this—curiosity aroused, satisfied, and the non-Japanese grew to love the various Japanese dishes. In the intervening years the Japanese themselves also learned to sample, eat and love the foods of the other peoples. (1969: 32)

This moment of imagined culinary sharing is an important re-telling of the history of Hawaiian food and, in effect, the larger history of Hawai'i. Within this narrative it is implied that the introduction of Japanese food to the Hawaiian was a pivotal event that led to the creation of contemporary "Hawaiian Cuisine," and, furthermore, that glimpsing this

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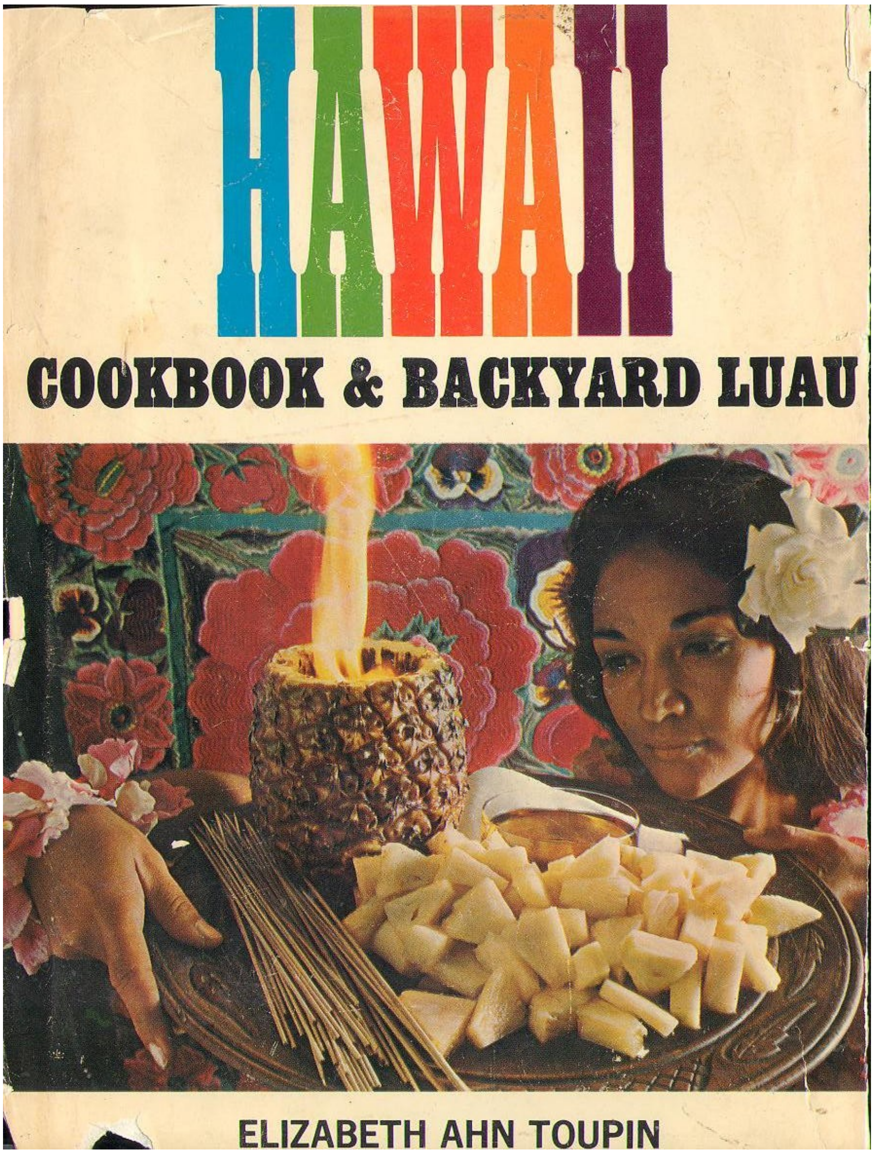
[9] There is a significant history to the mainland American consumption of Chinese food dating back to the nineteenth century. The 1920s saw a surge in the popularity of late night chop suey and chow mein restaurants in urban America and the introduction of Chinese frozen foods by the 1950s (Denker 2003: 99-110).

historical transaction is key to understanding Hawaiian history and food. However, this fictional portrayal of a nascent moment of culinary sharing creates a representation of cross-cultural food sharing while simultaneously privileging the Japanese contribution to this blended cuisine, reflecting a broader (and not un-problematic) cultural shift.

The Hawaii Cookbook and Backyard Luau

A year after the publication of *Hawaiian Cuisine* Elizabeth Ahn Toupin wrote a slim cookbook—*Restaurant of the 5 Volcanos Cook Book*—as a companion to the highly popular restaurant of the Hawaiian Pavilion at the 1964 New York World Fair.[10] Later, inspired by the success of the first volume, Toupin re-published an extended version of the text in 1967 as *The Hawaii Cookbook and Backyard Luau*. This text is a 216-page response to what Toupin describes as the insatiable popularity of Hawaiian food during the period. The introduction is written by popular author James Michener who explains "just as the islands are a tasty blend of many different peoples, so Island cooking is a blend of many different cuisines. This book tells you how to achieve that culinary balance" (10). Michener—as a white Quaker from Pennsylvania—is clearly acting as an intermediary between Toupin (as a Hawai'i-born, Korean American) and the potential white, mainland readers. His introduction, as do all introductions, works to authorize and validate the text; during this period, Michener is himself seen as an "expert" on the islands because of both his works of fiction (*Tales of the South Pacific* and *Hawaii)* but also because of his work on the international-political scene in postwar Japan (*Voice of Asia*).

[10] According to Toupin, the Restaurant of the 5 Volcanos was a highly popular meeting spot for WW II veterans to have informal reunions during the World's Fair. This compelling interest in the restaurant—by mostly white, mainland veterans—encouraged Toupin to write the later cookbook.


HAWAII
COOKBOOK & BACKYARD LUAU
ELIZABETH AHN TOUPIN

Michener's introduction also explains his surprise at finding Hawaiian supermarkets stocked with everything a mainland store supplies *as well as* sections containing Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Portuguese, Hawaiian and Polynesian food. He is clearly awed by the diversity of foods offered in Hawaiian grocery stores, and seemingly charmed by the complexity of the food-consumption possibilities. Michener contextualizes the panoply of foods by briefly explaining the history of culinary blending as part of the food-history of the island, explaining that *even* Caucasian tables are commonly graced by Japanese and Chinese food. His final rhetorical move is to provide some background information on Toupin, and, in essence, to authorize her by noting that she was a) born in Hawai'i b) well educated (at Bennington college) c) experienced as a hostess in Washington D.C. where she worked for Senator Inouye, and finally, d) that "she has eaten in homes of every description in Hawaii" (1967: 10).

James A. Michener with Elizabeth Ahn Toupin

Toupin follows Michener's introduction with a preface in which she explains that "'Hawaiian cooking' can become a way of life for it opens the mind, and more important, the palate to different tastes, cooking techniques, to cultures and the people themselves" (1967: 13). However, Toupin does not stop with this brief gesture towards the practice of multi-cultural eating in Hawai'i, but proceeds to outline a history of immigration and colonization. She also describes the various foods brought by each of these immigrant groups adding: "local products—pineapple, avocados, guavas, macademia nuts, bananas, passion fruit—are incorporated into recipes" (1967: 17). It is important to note that this overview of the history of Hawai'i includes information about the decimation of the native Hawaiian population—introduced by the phrase "before the white man…"—and furthermore makes specific mention of the history of intermarriage and Christianity as forces that impacted the culture of the Islands. She also provides specific details on the history of Asian migration, noting not only when and why migrants came to the Islands, but also making note of the regions from which the laborers came (1967: 15). This text is unique for these features, contributing a depth to the discussion of the history of Hawaiian food that contextualizes the cuisine in terms of (rather than in the absence of) the material history of colonization.

In contrast to *Hawaiian Cuisine*, Toupin's cookbook is organized by food events and geared towards entertaining. The chapters include "Hors d'oeuvres," "Backyard Luau," "Hawaiian Luau," "Dinners with Menus," and "Christmas in Hawaii." Occasion rather than racial/ethnic group coordinates the recipes found in each section. The "Backyard Luau" chapter includes a diverse range of recipes including "Guava Crisps," "Hawaiian Namasu," "Joan's Polynesian Ham Loaf," and "Lichee Chicken Salad," all suggested components of a backyard gathering (1967: 82-84). Recipes in this text also include parenthetical discussion of non-English words, although they are used by Toupin to *explain* rather than translate the dish and its ethnic origins. For instance, under a recipe for "Sushi" Toupin writes in parenthesis "Japanese Rice with Vinegar Sauce" (1967: 77). On other occasions she simply uses the parenthesis to provide an alternate name for this dish: e.g. "Sukiyaki" is also listed as "Hekka" but neither term is given added explanation. Toupin's use of the parenthetical offers to explain the recipes in a way that informs but does not simplify. Toupin is lauded—on the dust jacket text—for her thoroughness, where it is explained that "Mrs. Toupin not only tells us that *Daikon* is a long white radish sold in Oriental grocery stores, but goes on to explain what it is used for, and how, and its essential properties and flavor" (dustjacket).

The last two sections of Toupin's cookbook are a glossary of food terms and a comprehensive list of U.S.-based "Oriental" grocery stores where some of the more "unusual" food can be ordered by mail. Toupin's focus on entertaining is more explicit than in other cookbooks written by locals during this period. In some ways this feature makes the text more like *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Betty Crocker* cookbooks and their representation of Hawaiian-food-as-luau. However, there is a very different methodology at work; whereas the popular cookbooks are geared towards simple, easy luaus, Toupin's text interpellates a gourmand-reader interested in purchasing the right ingredients and making more-complex dishes that require longer preparation.

The "balance" implored by Michener's introduction perhaps resists the well-worn metaphor of the "melting pot" and, instead, implies a recognition of distinct cultural groups with their own particular histories. Indeed, the historical *specificity* with which Toupin treats the history of migration that led to the twentieth century demographics of the Hawaiian Islands is a very compelling aspect of this text. The preface to Toupin's text begins with the earliest settlers (Tahitians and Polynesians, 300BC), and walks the reader through "discovery" by James Cook, the development of a plantation economy, and the migration of laborers from Asia and Portugal, and therefore makes an important intervention in the limited representations of Hawaiian food being created in 1960s cookbooks.

The work of autoethnography: the Cold War cookbook paradigm

The important work being done in these two cookbooks—work that articulates the cultural and migration histories of the ethnic groups of Hawai'i—redresses the slipshod representations made in mainland cookbooks where "Hawai'i " is often represented as a vague amalgam of "oriental" culture. And it is in this way that these texts can be read in terms of what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as an *autoethnography*—texts that undertake to correct, through self-representation, the portrayals others have made. These cookbooks, written and promoted by people born in Hawai'i, carefully and painstakingly revise the evacuated understanding of Hawai'i and Hawaiian food constructed in other textual productions.

At the same time, the cookbooks are also working to *make known* a territory and its population which, in many ways, remained a *foreign other* to the mainland for many decades. Suspicion and distrust of Asia and the Pacific was a strong force in Cold War American culture. Amidst multiple wars in Asia (World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam), and during a period of intensified fear of the spread of communism and the threat of communist China, the work undertaken in these cookbooks offers an integrity and accuracy overlooked in other texts.

I would like to return to the fictional scene in which Kalani and Sato-san enjoy *nori* together, thus inaugurating the cultural blending that is "Hawaiian food." As a cultural critic who works on cookbooks and food, I continue to be wary of arguments—such as that made in Donna Gabaccia's *We Are What We Eat* (2000)—that suggest the inherent transformative power of cross-cultural eating. This is to say that I am suspect of the generalized notion that eating food of another culture is inherently multi-cultural and politically transformative. There is something particularly American—and highly dangerous—about the desire to *consume* another culture. However, I think that, when considering the particularities of Hawai'i and the deep and complex ethnic and racial histories that converge in the space of the Islands, it is important to consider the role that food may have played in constructing the 50th state. Within *Hawaiian Cuisine* and *Hawaii Cookbook* the history of multi-cultural eating takes on a nuanced and layered significance attentive to the racial, ethnic, and class factors attendant to this complex history.

In a recent email, Elizabeth Toupin described to me what she sees as the power of the Island's history of multi-ethnic eating as more than just the sharing of food. She explains:

> Food had always been part of the cultural and daily exchange between the various peoples of Hawaii [...] Remember, in their homelands, the Chinese were enemies of the Japanese, the Koreans the same, but thrown together in the plantation communities, they learned to like each other's food. A classic would be the much hated Portuguese lunas (supervisors who rode horses and carried whips in the plantations to keep the laborers in line), everyone loved their sweet bread and sausage, and thus, accepted them on a certain level outside their plantation roles.

Toupin is clearly not overlooking the real violence of racial hierarchy imparted by the European immigrants hired to supervise Asian settler and Native Hawaiian labor. Toupin's suggestion is that food worked as an arbiter of racial and class difference and, ultimately, laid the groundwork for acceptance "outside of their plantation roles." Albeit clichéd, the importance of food-sharing has deep significance to understanding the historical and cultural contexts of foodways in Hawai'i.

Reading *Hawaiian Cuisine* and *Hawaii Cookbook* as autoethnographic texts allows for an understanding of cookbook writing as a continuation of the grassroots activism and the claim to racial equality made by Inouye and Toupin in the 1940s. Through the delineation of specific food traditions (*Hawaiian Cuisine)* and the careful discussion of the history of immigration (*The Hawaii Cookbook and Backyard Luau*) these cookbooks make visible the cultural and social histories of Hawai'i previously rendered invisible by over-simplified mainland representations. In doing so these texts take up the claim for (state and individual subjects') full representation within the nation and make visible the specific material histories of the people of Hawai'i. While resisting the oversimplification in which many texts of the period indulge, these cookbooks simultaneously impose a new narrative—one no less challenged by the forces of hegemony, privilege and power—that revises the twentieth century understanding of "the 50th State".

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Feeding the World a Line?: Celebrity Activism and Ethical Consumer Practices From Live Aid to Product Red

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Abstract
This article examines the nature and efficacy of three major celebrity-inspired, ethical consumer charity campaigns: the 1984-5 famine relief movement, Live 8 and "Make Poverty History," and Product Red. Through an analysis of some of the most significant texts, spaces, and figures of each campaign, I establish how organizers capitalized on the "one-world" notion to effectively draw audiences to consume both charity concerts and merchandise; and I identify the economic and psychological beneficiaries of each campaign and their subsequent celebrity driven, ethical consumer spin offs. My analyses allow for a theorization of the ways in which both Africa and charity function within the Western cultural imagination.

> You can be absolutely sure, on the day you die, somebody is alive in Africa because one day you bought a record or a book or watched a pop concert. And that, at once, is a compliment and a triumph, and on the other hand, it is the ultimate indictment of us all. (Bob Geldof)

In the early 1980s, less than ten years after drought had devastated regions throughout the Horn of Africa, millions were once again faced with the prospect of starvation.[1] By the summer of 1983, as a result of civil war, government mismanagement of resources, changes in US and UK foreign aid policy, and environmental degradation, food and water had become scarce commodities in both Ethiopia and The Sudan.[2]

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[1] The Ethiopian famine of 1983-86 was the worst in recorded history according to the findings published in Stanley Siegel, Harvey Gutman, Tania Romashko and Louis Connick's *The U.S. Response to the African Famine, 1984-1986: An Analysis of Policy Formation and Program Management* (1986: 1).

[2] For more information on the complex causes of famine see Freedom House, *Ethiopia: The Politics of Famine* (1990: 45). For detailed discussions regarding

Consequently, hoards of desperate refugees left their isolated villages in the provinces and migrated toward feeding centers and refugee camps. The camps, not being designed either to house or help so many, were quickly overrun by refugees needing food, clothing, shelter, and protection from disease.[3] Due to the limited resources available at such camps, alongside the unpredictability of food shipments, many refugees were denied the aid they required.[4] By the time the famine had reached

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the economic factors (national and global) that led to the famine see both Alexander De Waal's *Famine That Kills: Darfur, Sudan 1984-89* (1989); and Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose's *The Ethiopian Famine,* (1987: 113-26). For further information on the idea of famine as genocide in Ethiopia, see Michael Maren's *The Road To Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity*, (1997: 116); and Gebre-Ab Barnabas' *The Trek: An Ethiopian Family's Struggle Against Famine*, (1989: 15).

[3] In *Surrender or Starve: The Wars Behind the Famine*, Robert D. Kaplan describes how diseases such as dysentery were a major contributing factor to deaths in the camps (1988: 5). Myles F. Harris describes the ramifications of such disease when he points out how the price of one pint of blood was equal to feeding a whole shed of children. See *Breakfast In Hell: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account of the Politics of Hunger in Ethiopia* (1987), 10-13.

[4] Angela Penrose provides a stunning example of the inadequacies of the camps when she states that by October 1984 nearly 100 people were dying daily in Korem. She also states that, "2,612 out of 7,200 died between 29 October 1984 and the end of January 1985" (Jansson, Harris, and Penrose 1987: 157). Arguably, these rates improve once, as a result of the Buerk/Amin documentary and the ensuing public response, aid starts to pour into the worst affected regions. Pleas for aid had been ignored up until the BBC took measures: see *The Trek* (Barnabas 1989:13), for references to denied requests. For further explanation detailing why and how the US and the EEC denied aid to Ethiopia see David A. Korn, *Ethiopia: The Politics of Famine* (1990). See Penrose in *The Ethiopian Famine* for further information regarding conservative US policies on Ethiopia and how US refused to provide aid to a Soviet regime (Jansson, Harris, and Penrose 1987: 149-50) but provided support to Somalian guerillas opposing the Ethiopian Marxist government (Jansson, Harris, and Penrose 1987: 213) and reference to the EEC's claim that, despite surpluses, there was no grain to spare for Ethiopia (Jansson, Harris, and Penrose 1987: 151).

its height in the summer of 1984, the daily death toll in almost every camp was in the hundreds.

Despite numerous stories printed in the press,[5] the disaster in the Horn was for the most part ignored by Westerners. US and UK governments developed foreign aid policies that only exacerbated an already dire situation there. In July 1984, almost by accident, BBC foreign correspondent Michael Buerk suddenly realized the enormity of the famine upon a visit to a refugee center in Northern Ethiopia.[6] Three months later, he returned to Korem with film-maker Mohammed Amin to produce what can now be described as an exposé of the famine that shocked the world and led to the first consumer driven global aid movement.

While in Korem Michael Buerk and Mohammed Amin pushed the limits of their battery-powered equipment to produce two lengthy news reports (both over 7 minutes in length) depicting the thousands of refugees awaiting food shipments. Both reports were unprecedented, not simply because they graphically portrayed the horrors of mass starvation, but because of the public response they received. The first report was aired on the BBC on the 24th October 1984. The images of starving people, of dying children (the camera actually captures the death of a three year-old girl), had such an effect on news producers in the UK that they agreed to show the first film in its entirety, despite its length

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[5] For more detailed information on reactions to the famine in the print media see Kaplan, Robert (1988), 31-54; and Moeller, Susan, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sells Disease, War, Famine and Death* (1999), 112.

[6] The only reason why BBC correspondent for South Africa, Michael Buerk had leave to visit Ethiopia was because there was little going on in South Africa that week. And, as Harrison and Palmer describe in *News*, Buerk stumbled upon the Ethiopian famine when, in July of 1984, he realized that he could not go as planned to Mozambique to "put together a five-minute BBC appeal… in some area where famine was a particular problem" (Harrison and Palmer 1986: 107). Because the "request [for the appeal] had come in ridiculously late" and because "the logistics of trying to get into northern Mozambique and out again on the time scale were just impossible" (107), Buerk—under the advisement of Paddy Coulter, the head of communications at Oxfam—decided to visit Ethiopia where "things were getting desperate" (Harrison and Palmer 1986: 108).

(Harrison and Palmer 1986: 123). Despite being cut to 2 minutes for the NBC nightly news, Buerk and Amin's rendering of the "biblical" famine, also greatly affected American producers (Harrison and Palmer 1986: 123). Tom Brokaw entitled the shortened piece "Faces of Death."

The first report was viewed by 470 millions viewers worldwide.[7] The actual number of viewers, however, can no longer be estimated as the report was not only re-aired by the BBC at the beginning of the Live Aid event in July 1985 (the BBC version of Live Aid was transmitted throughout Europe), but is also featured on the DVD box set of the Live Aid event produced in 2004. Due to both its graphic nature and its reach, the Buerk/Amin report was integral to informing Westerners, and inspiring celebrities and members of the public to band together as part of a global famine relief movement.

Outraged by the images of emaciated children and their desperate parents, singer-songwriter Bob Geldof called the British public to act. With friends and like-minded supporters, Geldof established Band Aid, a charity to help prevent famine in Africa, and produced the first of a number of Ethiopia singles designed to raise funds and awareness of the plight of Ethiopian (and later Sudanese) refugees. The Band Aid single "Do They Know It's Christmas" was released in November 1984. It featured numerous best-selling British artists and became the fastest selling single to hit the UK charts, selling three million records and holding the Christmas Number One position in the charts for five weeks. The single raised over ten million British pounds. On the 5th March 1985, recording artists in the United States followed suit. Guided by Geldof and Harry Belafonte, forty-five recording artists joined together under the banner of 'United Support of Artists for Africa' (USA for Africa), and recorded "We Are the World." Like its British counterpart, the song

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[7] In *The Ethiopian Famine* Angela Penrose (administrator of the University Relief and Rehabilitation organization) provides the viewing figures for the Buerk/Amin documentary; the report was seen by over 30 million viewers in the UK and the US in October and, according to the BBC, "was later shown by 425 of the world's broadcasting organisations with a total audience of 470 million" (Jansson, Harrison, Penrose 1987: 154).

raised millions,[8] staying at number 1 in the US for four weeks and in the UK for two.[9]

The UK and US famine relief songs were, like the Buerk/Amin report, integral in the rallying of public support. While journalists and academics rightly criticized “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” and “We Are the World” for their ethnocentric overtones and flawed one-world sentiment, the songs received little such criticism from the public.[10] On the contrary, the songs became the self-congratulatory theme tunes to a growing movement that provided many disenfranchised groups with a sense of purpose, community, and agency as global citizens. The one-world sentiment, evident in “Do They Know It’s Christmas” but expressed more overtly in “We Are the World’s” comparison between the problems Americans and Africans face, particularly appealed to the masses. In *What Makes Charity Work* (2000), Myron Magnet provides some indication as to not only why the songs appealed, but how the famine reports and famine songs led to such a grand gesture of global togetherness and charity. He describes how methods and philosophies of charity have changed in the United States and Britain over the past seven hundred years, and identifies a specific shift in attitudes towards those in need of charity by the 1960s: “Philanthropy […] became wholesale rather than a retail enterprise, concentrating not on individuals but on an abstract Mankind and on the all-embracing systems that purportedly misshaped so many lives. Charity projects became gigantic in scale and ambition” (Magnet 2000: vii-x). This shift in emphasis from individual

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[8] According to Roy Shuker in *Understanding Popular Music*, “We Are the World” (with merchandise) grossed over $50 million (2001: 253).

[9] Both “Christmas” and “We Are the World” were international hits; in addition, they inspired similar Ethiopia singles such as Germany’s “Nackt Im Wind,” Canada’s “Tears Are Not Enough,” and South Africa’s “Operation Hunger.” For further discussion of each Ethiopia single, see Straw, Will and Stan Rijven, “Rock for Ethiopia” (1989), 198-209.

[10] For further discussion of the Ethiopia singles as ethnocentric, one-world visions, see Reed. T.V., *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (2005); Straw, Will and Stan Rijven, “Rock for Ethiopia” (1989); and Garofalo, Reebee, “Understanding Mega-Events: If We Are the World, Then How Do We Change it?” (1992), 15-36.

suffering to structural inequity becomes most evident when considering the famine relief movements of the 80s, as well as the spin-off ‘aids’ and charity branding campaigns that have become so popular in the early Twenty-First Century. The fact that more contemporary campaigns also form around celebrity activism and the global production and consumption of charity related merchandise is also significant to any understanding of the cultural function of both Africa (as a metaphor and empty signifier) and charity in the West.

This paper begins with an examination of the 1984-5 famine relief movement, in particular the nature and efficacy of its methods to raise funds and awareness for the starving in Africa, to determine not only the cultural capital of celebrity inspired, ethical consumer charity campaigns; but also to prepare the groundwork for an analysis of the ways in which the 1984-5 famine relief movement became the blueprint for future contemporary global campaigns designed to ‘Save Africa’. Through an analysis of some of the most significant texts, spaces, and figures of the 1984-5 famine relief movement, I establish how organizers capitalized on the one-world notion in an attempt to draw audiences to consume both charity concerts and merchandise; I identify the beneficiaries of the famine relief movement and its subsequent celebrity driven, ethical consumer spin offs; and I attempt to theorize how both Africa and charity function within the Western cultural imagination.

This project asks why the famine relief movement model worked, why it appealed, and why the methods of the famine relief movement are still employed today. In order to determine the continuing appeal of celebrity activism and ethical consumerism, I look to the Twentieth anniversary of Live Aid; the three-day, global Live 8 benefit concerts; and to the innovative branding campaign named Product Red that takes celebrity activism and ethical consumerism for Africa to a new level. This analysis will provide insight into ethical consumerism in late Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries, as well as help us better understand the role of the suffering Third World and of charity in the West. Ultimately I ask who is now feeding the world, and what is the world being fed? The 1984 famine relief movement started with the notion that privileged Brits are feeding the world. Are we feeding anyone anything other than this line? And is that line a line of merchandise, or a line of capitalist, imperialist rhetoric?

The famine relief movement, 1984-5

Celebrity response to the famine precipitated a shift in famine coverage and kick-started what was to become the first global relief movement. Once celebrities became involved, the media quickly shifted gear, choosing to focus on the more aesthetically pleasing celebrities banding together to fight hunger, rather than upon those dying. The US and UK press covered hundreds of stories about Band Aid in the first weeks after the Buerk/ Amin documentary was aired; news channels produced stories about the movement for diverse audiences; and music programs and channels on both the radio and television repeatedly aired the songs, interviews with participants, and advertisements for the Band Aid cause. News images of the famine were replaced by images of celebrities gathered together to record the Ethiopia singles and advertise the famine relief movement. On the radio, reports of mass starvation were juxtaposed with the sounds of celebrities singing to "feed" or unite the world.

As a result of the extensive public and industry interest in the movement, campaigners attempting to raise money and awareness for those affected by catastrophe in the Third World were offered an array of new opportunities to fundraise and advertise. And, as the famine relief campaigns continued, the interests of charities and celebrity activists became increasingly tied up with those of media agencies and corporate sponsors who, working together, had the capacity to reach wider donor pools.

In July 1985, Band Aid and USA for Africa joined forces to produce what can be described as the climax of the 1984-5 famine relief movement, the Live Aid benefit concert. The star-studded concert was performed simultaneously in two separate cities linked by satellite, London in the UK, and Philadelphia in the US; 162,000 attended the concert at the two venues (70,000 at Wembley, London and 92,000 at Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia). The sixteen hour event was broadcast live, via seven telecommunications satellites, to an estimated one billion television viewers in over 150 countries worldwide. Over the course of one weekend, Live Aid raised over seventy million dollars to "feed the world" (Shuker 2001: 237).

Live Aid was heralded as “The Greatest Show on Earth” by newspapers around the world.[11] In the US and the UK, national news programs and local papers alike reported on the technological components of the Live Aid, describing the ways in which satellite feed works, the amount of cable laid at each stadium, and the amount of energy needed to hold the event.[12] Consumers and donors were enticed by descriptions of the event as a never before seen feat of “technological wizardry”, a “global jukebox”, and a charity rock “triumph”.[13]

The show arose out of a search for possibilities: the possibilities of advanced visual and communication technologies, of popular culture texts and performances, and of global social movements. While ultimately it offered few new options to those starving in Africa, Live Aid offered many economic and cultural opportunities for the cities in which the concerts were held, for celebrity organizers and participants, for corporate sponsors, and for concert-goers. The cities of London and Philadelphia gained revenue and positive exposure for hosting the event. Celebrities, record companies, instrument and equipment manufacturers, and telecommunications companies all benefited from unprecedented advertising. Corporate sponsors, particularly those endorsed by famine celebrities involved in the concert, benefited, not only from the advertising gained through product placement (note for instance the paper Pepsi cups perched on amplifiers and keyboards throughout the concert) and commercial airtime; but also through their connection to an ethical consumer movement (for at least a day, drinking Pepsi became synonymous with being ethical). And members of the public benefitted

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[11] “The Greatest Show on Earth.” 12 July 1985. *Scottish Daily Express*. 19.

[12] e.g. “Build Up to Live Aid.” 12 July 1985. *News Round*. London: BBC.; and Gruson, Lindsey. July 1985 “Global Concert Gives Philadelphia A Chance To Introduce Itself To The World,” *New York Times*, 13.

[13] Stevens, L. 13 July 1985. “Global Concert Gives Philadelphia A Chance To Introduce Itself To The World,” *New York Times*.1: 5; Stevens, L. 14 July 1985. “72,000 Fans Flock To Live Aid,” *Sunday Mail* Queensland, Australia; Harrington, Richard and Geoffrey Himes. 14 July 1985. “Rock Around the World: Live Aid Concerts Raise Millions For Africa,” *The Washington Post*; Harrington, Richard. 12 July 1985. “The Greatest Show On Earth, Tomorrow: ‘Beatles’ May Reunite for the Global Concert,” *The Washington Post*. D1.

through their new definitions as ethical consumers and global citizens, through their identification with famine-celebrities, and through their multi-faceted relationships with compassionate corporate sponsors.

The global spectacle was extremely profitable for the economies and images of the concerts' host nations and cities. As one *New York Times* writer pointed out after the concert, this free publicity was particularly useful for the city of Philadelphia: "officials grabbed the Live Aid concert as a way of rehabilitating the city's image in the aftermath of the Move tragedy." In improving a city's image, and encouraging tourism, the Live Aid events proved highly profitable for the cities of London and Philadelphia by generating revenue through audience spending on transport, parking, accommodation, food and beverages, and other tourist merchandise. Because Margaret Thatcher refused to wave the 17.5% value added tax (VAT) on tickets or concert merchandise, the British government also benefited directly from the concert.

The fact that the Live Aid concert benefited two major cities within two of the most affluent nations in the world (and therefore, by default, benefited the nations too) leads me to two further points. First, it proves that, despite the shifts in economic power resulting from the processes of globalization, the US and the UK still maintain a position at the epicenter of the globe. Second, in this position (supported by the media, consumer markets), both countries (and the people within them) enjoyed a certain amount of privilege as seeming global leaders of a compassionate movement.

The Western celebrities involved in the Ethiopia songs and Live Aid benefited similarly through their involvement. Not only did all, like the cities of London and Philadelphia, gain access to free advertising, but all—despite having to donate money themselves—were also represented by mainstream media as concerned charitable beings.[14] In the US, the more popular the star, the more advertising she or he gained: the performances of stars such as Madonna, who headlined in the UK, were recorded and replayed during primetime (thus, overshadowing other,

[14] For a discussion of celebrities receiving free advertisement though their involvement with Live Aid, see Will Straw and Stan Rijven's "Rock for Ethiopia."

lesser acts).[15] A number of celebrities garnered attention not only by attending the concert or being part of the Ethiopia videos, but in the "making of" documentaries and media reports of preparation for events. In every case, the famine sufferer was replaced by more aesthetically pleasing celebrity and charity related merchandise: suffering was transferred from famine sites in Ethiopia onto famine relief sites in the West and, perhaps more specifically, onto the voices, bodies, and faces of famine celebrities. As a result of the substitution of suffering and famine sites by celebrity commodities and sites of performance, compassion was redirected away from the famine victim toward the celebrities singing on behalf of the victim and, later, toward the donor that identified with the celebrity. The shift in focus, away from famine sufferer to charity and charity merchandise, was exacerbated as the number of texts and commodities increased, and, as more diverse texts and famine related commodities were produced.

The celebrities who benefited the most from their involvement and exposure in Band Aid, USA for Africa, and Live Aid were the singer-songwriters who composed the Ethiopia singles, and the organizers of the Live Aid event. Bob Geldof, a singer who had, by 1984, lost much of the celebrity status he had enjoyed in the 1970s, rebuilt his career as a result of his participation. Not only did he begin to make music that sold well—he wrote "Do They Know It's Christmas?"—but he was also able to build a successful production company. In addition, Geldof became so renowned for his charity work that he currently works as an African advisor to the UK government and, in 1986, received an honorary knighthood from the Queen of England.

In the course of his explanation of how to host a successful mega-event to the leader of Burkina Faso in 1985, Geldof describes that the format for future aid extravaganzas (future 'aids') should involve the employment of British contractors, using Western made equipment, and inviting Western superstars. His assertion that Western organizers and sponsors should be used indicates that, at least for Geldof, a significant impetus behind the mega-event is the potential to make profit for the

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[15] For a detailed discussion of ABC and MTV's Live Aid line-up, see Esnault, Jean-Manuel and Daniel Agudo Rodríguez, "The Unofficial Live Aid Site" (2002). See <http://liveaid.free.fr/>.

Western nations involved. While the majority of profits of the event went to charity, numerous corporations and individuals also profited from advertising and production rights. As pointed out in a 2006 article in *The New Internationalist*, Geldof has profited immensely from his role as savior to Africa (perhaps why he is so committed to prevent any appearance of African agency in the Live Aid and later Live 8 concerts). He has become a figure relied upon not only by the British government on issues concerning Africa, but he also owns the company that produces the videos and DVDs of Live Aid and Live 8 for home sales. His company, Ten Alps, also produced spin off products, such as the DVD series *Geldof in Africa.* Perhaps more significant, however, are the connections that Geldof has developed with multinational corporations as a result of his re-found fame during the famine relief movement and his involvement in multinational charity organizations.[16] Like Geldof, other organizers and sponsors involved in Live Aid have enjoyed major successes in the corporate and entertainment world. Harvey Goldsmith, promoter of Live Aid, as of 2007, had his own television show *Get Your Act Together*, also produced by Ten Alps.

The ways in which Lionel Richie (co-composer of "We Are the World") benefited financially through his relationship with the famine relief campaigns once again emphasizes how celebrity and corporate interests are inseparable. The Pepsi commercials shown in the US throughout the course of the Live Aid concert are worth mentioning because they very clearly illustrate the interwoven relationships between sponsors and celebrity participants and between commercial texts and the concert text. Journalist Tom Shales caustically explains how, for instance, Lionel Richie and Pepsi worked together as a mutually beneficial advertising unit. Shales states:

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[16] The anonymous writer of *The New Internationalist* article entitled "Bob Geldof" explains: "One of [Geldof's] company's subsidiaries – Ten Alps Events – specializes in creating 'branded environments' and has worked for some of the world's most powerful corporations, including BP, Glaxo Smithkline and Microsoft, not to mention the British Foreign Office." All of the above have a vested interest in African poverty and disease.

> Less charitably minded was the Lionel Richie spot for Pepsi-Cola informing viewers they were part of a new generation (newer than the one in April, when the commercial first aired?). Richie, mercifully absent from most of the program, appeared at the very end in Philadelphia. One couldn't help thinking that this appearance had to be worth a million bucks to Pepsi after the rigorous reinforcement of its Richie ties all through the day. (Shales 1985)

Shales' comments are more astute than he realizes. Richie shared connections simultaneously with the famine relief movement and Pepsi. This connection becomes obvious when one compares the lyrics of "We Are the World," a song that he co-wrote with fellow Pepsi celebrity promoter, Michael Jackson, and those of the song in the Pepsi commercial.[17] The chorus-line of Richie's song in the Pepsi commercial is "We made our choice/ Make it a Pepsi."[18] This line sounds rather strongly reminiscent of the chorus-line, "There's a choice we're making," in the "We Are the World" single. According to the end of the Richie Pepsi commercial, Pepsi is the "choice of a generation." Could it possibly be that the choice "we're making" when listening to "We Are the World" is not only the choice to help feed starving Ethiopians, but also to become part of a consumer-savvy, philanthropically minded generation—a generation that, according to the end of Richie's Pepsi commercial, drinks Pepsi?

In a rather cynical remark Marcus Greil sums up the potential consequences of the Pepsi, Richie, and Live Aid connection. He states:

> the true result will likely be less that certain Ethiopian individuals will live, or anyway live a bit longer than they otherwise would have, than that Pepsi will get the

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[17] Interesting connections abound. For instance, EMCI (Entertainment Marketing & Communications, Inc.), "a Stamford, CT based agency that links consumer companies with music and entertainment properties" not only "handled such landmark entertainment alliances as Pepsi-Michael Jackson," but handled the corporate sponsorship for Live Aid. For more information, see "Rocketing To Success." May 2000. *PROMO Magazine.* See also <www.emcionline.com/pdf/2.pdf>.

[18] Richie, Lionel. 1985. Advertisement for Pepsi. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fentTLsWhw>.

> catch phrase of the advertising campaign sung for free by Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen, and all the rest. (In Garofalo 1992: 29)

In using Richie and the music video format, the Pepsi commercial easily blended with the Live Aid performances that also appeared in the style of music video. It is at this point, where Pepsi and the famine became virtually synonymous. It became no longer possible to determine why consumers watch, listen, or consume. It is no longer possible to identify if their interests lie in philanthropic impulses or in being part of a community that is both philanthropic and corporate sanctioned. And it is no longer necessary to be a compassionate consumer in order to participate as a member of the famine relief market.

As the example of the Pepsi commercial clearly illustrates, the Live Aid benefit concert is inherently tied to corporate and celebrity interests. Those corporate interests ultimately resulted in a downplaying of the famine: why give the victims airtime (when, supposedly, everyone already knows what they look like) when airtime can be devoted to advertising more saleable products? Here Pepsi relied upon Richie's association with the movement, his image as a compassionate artist and as a member of the ethical consumer community (an image produced by the "We Are the World" video), to sell their soft drink products.

Rather than employing a superstar to advertise their phone service, AT&T employed a cheaper alternative. Shales points out that, in their advertisements, "[p]hotographs of the victims of famine were melded together while new lyrics to the company's old 'Reach Out' theme were sung: 'Reach out, reach out and touch someone/ Someone whose only hope is you'." Again, in order to sell phone lines, AT&T constructed a symbolic relationship between its service and the service provided by aid agencies. They, like Pepsi, relied on the association of their product with the ethic of compassionate consumerism and the famine relief movement to encourage audiences to buy what they have on offer, despite the fact that their phone service has nothing to directly connect it either to the famine or the famine relief movement.[19]

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[19] It is quite possible that AT&T's decision to sponsor the Live Aid event may have been an attempt to elide criticism of its monopoly, criticism that led to its breakup into the "baby bells" in 1984.

Both Pepsi and AT&T relied on the fact that their captive audiences in the stadiums (ads were also posted on billboards, and merchandise was made available at the concert) and at home were members of a new generation of rock community. Pepsi relied on the fact that audiences would see Richie and identify him as a famine relief figure and, by a process of transference, see Pepsi not only as a refreshing drink, but a famine related product (one need not mention the irony of a soda company endorsing an event intended to raise money and awareness for a group of people dying as a result of famine and drought). AT&T also capitalized on the rock community, assuming that the audience would effectively read the music video adapted to the advert on screen.

As a result of the videos and later the Live Aid concert, famine relief movement sponsors sold famine relief merchandise worth millions. While the proceeds of each supplementary text and product went to the famine relief cause, each additional visual text served to advertise the celebrities involved, their endorsements, their record companies, all the accoutrements necessary to maintain their celebrity image, and the producers and distributors of each text (be they producers and distributors such as RCA/Columbia Home Videos that produced and distributed *The Making of "We Are the World"* or Bob Geldof's Ten Alps that has produced and distributed the Live Aid DVD compendium).

The merchandise that accompanied the Live Aid concert not only economically benefited the movement but also private citizens, various writers, publishers, and publishing/production companies. Merchandising included not only footage, but also concert programs, a series of books including the not-for-profit *World Wide Concert Book* (proceeds of which went to Band Aid) and *Live Aid* (a for-profit text published for children by Cornerstones of Freedom/ Children's Press Chicago), clothing,[20] and, souvenirs such as press passes and tickets (the revenue for which is not guaranteed to go to the famine relief cause).

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[20] Arguably the Live Aid logo was also a valuable commodity. Organizers fearing that, prior to the concert, pirates would create bootleg merchandise, kept the logo under wraps. "Live Aid Faces Rip-Off." 11 July 1985. *Scottish Daily Express*. 15.

Whether or not the profit for merchandise went to the famine relief cause, it is clear that sales were made as a direct result of the Ethiopia songs and video, video footage of famine in the Horn, and the Live Aid concert disseminated to an estimated 1.5 billion people around the globe. To participate in the famine relief movement, the public had to actively consume famine images and famine relief texts. Participants became united both in their shared knowledge of how to read famine relief texts and their roles as consumers. The ethical consumer market was both identified and unified through acts of consuming and purchasing within the famine relief site, and through the evocation of compassion that each consumer text and act of purchase enabled and intensified.

For participants, the famine relief events offered the opportunity to develop and participate in newly formed rock communities, charity driven communities, and global communities. The role of ethical consumer also provided many, if only temporarily, with a sense of political strength that allowed participants to affect socio-cultural change within and through the creation of new cultural sites of production and reception. In *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism* (1992) scholar and activist Mica Nava provides a most effective definition of consumerism. She states: "[c]onsumerism is far more than just economic activity: it is also about dreams and consolation, communication and confrontation, image and identity. Like sexuality, it consists of a multiplicity of fragmented and contradictory discourses" (Nava 1992: 67). Here Nava links consumerism to desire, expression, and identity formation. She succinctly intimates how, like the sexual object and sexual act, the consumer object and act of consumption have the potential not only to provide the consumer pleasure, but also with a sense of self. Nava argues, as a market force, consumers are not only provided with modes of expression and agency, but with the power to affect change on the individual, communal, and global levels. By consuming famine and famine relief texts, by donating time and money to the famine relief effort, consumers not only showed their propensity for compassion for the Other; but they also elicited pleasure, and carved out for themselves the new socio-cultural role of compassionate consumer, of self-reliant philanthropist, of worthy citizen. By embracing ethical consumerism, through their good deeds and consumer habits, ordinary citizens challenged their governments' rationale for reducing aid to African nations in need, and, most significantly, altered UK and

US foreign policies regarding aid. Ultimately, involvement in famine relief allowed for the creation of socio-cultural sites within which the general public could experience pleasure and a sense of community.

In many respects the 1984-5 famine relief movement was a series of successful events that showed the world how noble and charitable Western nations, celebrities, and citizens could be. It did, however, also have some effect on the lives of some starving peoples in the Horn of Africa. Because US and UK governments were wary of providing aid to communist nations in the Horn, aid budgets for Ethiopia had been minimized prior to the Buerk/Amin report. Both governments feared that the Ethiopian government would misappropriate funds and food aid sent from the West. The aid that was sent was often processed through and delivered via other relief organizations (for instance, the British government sunk funds into the Norwegian Church Aid and the US into the Catholic Relief Services) (Kent 1987: 70). However, after the creation of Band Aid, USA for Africa, and Live Aid, government attitudes changed. The ability of celebrity and public opinion to alter government policy became evident at that point. Such conservative policies were immediately overturned when, in November 1984, as a result of media and public pressure, "20 fixed-wing aircraft and 30 helicopters from the UK, USA, USSR, FRG, and GDR, Italy and Libya were involved in airlifting supplies" (Jansson 1987: 154).[21] This fact alone proves that the power of celebrity and public opinion, of ethical consumer campaigns, should not be under-estimated.

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[21] By 1985, the public in the US and the UK had, in large part, changed their minds about their abilities to help peoples in the Horn. After the Buerk/Amin report, a number of exposés were produced by various media producers. See: "Cry, Ethiopia, Cry" (1984); Blundy, David and Paul Vallely, *With Geldof In Africa: Confronting The Famine Crisis* (1985); "Live Aid's Desert Gamble" (1985). According to Robert D. Kaplan news reports in late 1985 started to focus on the public backlash against aid agencies and public anger at being 'duped' by both the media and newly emerged aid organizations such as Band Aid (Kaplan 1988: 7 and 11).

The Live 8 concerts, 2005

Unlike USA for Africa, the Band Aid charity continued to promote African poverty awareness after Live Aid. A number of spin-off 'aids' were created to further support Band Aid's agenda. Following Live Aid in 1985 came Fashion Aid and Sport Aid (to name but a few) in the UK, and Farm Aid in the US. While some of the spin off movements focused on a different group of recipients (i.e. Farm Aid was designed to give aid to US farmers as well as overseas recipients), the basic methods of fundraising and awareness raising employed by the Band Aid charity continued to be employed. On 2nd July 2005, a number of Live Aid organizers arranged Live 8 to celebrate the Twentieth anniversary of the first global concert. Prior to the events, contemporary British celebrities re-released a version of "Do They Know It's Christmas?" Benefit concerts were then held in ten different locations around the globe (London, Cornwall, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Philadelphia, Barrie, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Moscow, and Edinburgh) over a three-day period. The final concert took place in the Scottish capital, to coincide with the G8 Summit being held in Gleneagles (approximately 40 miles away).

The Live 8 concerts once again provided a venue for the free advertising of celebrities. Veteran Live Aid performers such as Madonna and Elton John still took center stage; but newer stars from every participating country also contributed greatly. Providers of equipment and sponsors such as Motorola also no doubt benefited from their participation and their new image as ethical corporations.

While the aims of Live 8 were the same as those of Live Aid, to raise awareness of African poverty in the West, the Live 8 concerts were distinct for a number of reasons. Rather than giving money, participants in all ten locations—and the thirty billion viewers around the globe—were asked to give their names to a 'live8 list', to be presented by Live 8 representatives to Tony Blair, the chair of the 2005 G8. Organizers believed that public pressure, symbolized by such a petition, would encourage the G8 leaders to cancel debt in a number of African countries and loosen trade restrictions with willing African nations. Thirty million people gave their names, which were then projected on screens behind performers at the concert venues. As is stated on the Live 8 website, "The Story So Far," participants "couldn't have made it clearer that we expect politicians of this generation to end the scandal of stupid, immoral poverty."[22]

Although Live Aid made a clear political statement in 1985 to Thatcher's government and the Reagan administration, the first, founding concert appeared to be less seriously political than its successors. At Live Aid, most emphasis was placed upon the global possibilities of the concert, and the attempt to build a globally conscious audience of donors. The Live 8 concerts, being deliberately scheduled to coincide with the G8 summit, were certainly designed to make a more overt political statement. In the 1980s, leaders were not made accountable nor did they engage in the famine relief movement: the most effective questioning of policy was Geldof's occasional and opportune outbursts directed at Thatcher. In 2005, however, eight world leaders were being given a specific agenda: "Make Poverty History." And the Live 8 organizers, being supported by the ONE foundation and educated by effective global charities such as OXFAM, had a specific list of requirements that was supported by tens of millions of ordinary citizens around the world.

Like Live Aid, the 2005 concerts were hailed as unprecedented global spectacles. Live 8 employed the most advanced technologies to advertise, transmit, and gain support for the concerts. The events were advertised using print, televisual, and virtual media; state of the art satellite technologies were used to connect and disseminate the ten concerts; and participants were asked to "give their names" via text message. However, as with Live Aid, the hype and the technology overshadowed the cause. Few Africans were allowed to perform, thus proving that little had changed since 1985 when Geldof, during a visit to Burkina Faso, undermined national customs, laughed at the ceremonies designed in his honor, and scathingly joked about the impossibility of putting on a Live Aid event in Africa because such an event would fail to attract Michael Jackson (Blundy and Vallely 1985: 47-9). Geldof's decision that only musicians with more than four million records sold could play, otherwise people in China would 'switch off', resulted in

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[22] Live 8. 2007. "The Long walk to Justice." See <http://www.live8live.com/>

many African performers being ineligible.[23] Many of those that were, were ghettoized at the Eden Project venue, Cornwall.

Despite the overt political agenda of the three-day global event, Live 8 was designed in such a way that it not only excluded Africans, but it also overshadowed one of the largest public protests in the history of Scotland.[24] The scheduling of the last concert in Murrayfield, Edinburgh to coincide with G8 Summit meetings, could be seen as a deliberate attempt to elide real public opinion by wrapping protest in palatable packages for the global market. Considering that Geldof, the founder of Band Aid and the brains behind the "Feed the World" theme tune and Live Aid/8 concerts, functioned in 2005 as a liaison for the British government—a role so shocking considering that Geldof still lacks either appropriate knowledge of the causes of poverty in Africa, uses essentialist rhetoric, and calls for a new form of exploitation of Africa—such a reading does not seem so far fetched.[25]

The ways in which Geldof sees fit to patronize peoples from decolonized nations became very clear at the end of the Murrayfield concert when, during the end of the concert speech, Geldof—alongside Bono—asked the crowd to sing "Flower of Scotland." While on the one hand he arranged a concert to avert the public gaze from Scottish protest, on the other hand he asked a considerable crowd of Scots to sing their unofficial anthem, a song that speaks to the exploitation of Scotland as a colonized nation and calls for the overthrow of English domination.

Arguably, for the crowd at Murrayfield, the concerts functioned to create a community united by nationality. The majority of performers at the event were Scottish. Scottish band Travis intermingled traditional Scottish tunes—many of which are songs of rebellion that would be well known to Scottish audience members—with their hit songs. And the

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[23] See "Bob Geldof." January 2006. *New Internationalist* 386. See also <http://www.newint.org/columns/worldbeaters/2006/01/01/bob-geldof/>.

[24] On 6th July 2005 over 5,000 protesters participated in an anti-globalization demonstration in Auchterarder, Scotland, a village close to the Gleneagles hotel where G8 leaders were holding their 2005 summit.

[25] For a discussion of Geldof's problematic attitudes and rhetoric, see "Bob Geldof." January 2006. *New Internationalist* 386. See also <http://www.newint.org/columns/worldbeaters/2006/01/01/bob-geldof/>.

concert ended with the crowd singing the unofficial national anthem. While other concert audiences may not have felt as unified as a national community, they most certainly were connected as part of a global community of concerned people, willing to give their time and names to a cause. At the same time, however, viewers at home and at the ten locations, were connected as viewers; as a community of pop and rock appreciators, a community of consumers.

The Live 8 event also had a direct influence upon the policies and agreements made at the G8 summit.[26] All leaders present agreed to cancel the national debt of eighteen African nations immediately, and another twenty in the following few years. In addition, the G8 leaders promised to provide $50 billion in aid. However, by 2006, such pledges had already begun to slide.[27] The Band Aid charity organizers, despite their flaws and conflicting interests, are now engaged in a battle to make many leaders follow through on their promises to Africa. By June 2009, the spotlight had landed on France and Italy in particular, since both countries had seriously reneged on offers to provide aid and relieve debt.[28] The UK is the only nation to have honored its promises and paid its share of the pledged amount of aid. Geldof continues to tour the world and take leaders of wealthy nations to task for their neglect. Arguably, however, Geldof's endeavors will always be tainted by the fact that he, and thus his charity foundation, is too wrapped up in the notion of Africa as potentially exploitable resource to affect any notable change for the average African person.

Product Red, 2006-present

The legacy of Live Aid and Live 8 is the campaigns and movements that borrow celebrity activist and ethical consumer techniques. The most effective spin off campaign is a campaign that capitalizes on ethical consumer desire and celebrity egotism. Product Red, a business model that once again reiterates the vision of one-world that Live Aid and Live

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[26] Larry Elliot and Kate Connolly, "In 2005, G8 Pledged $50bn for Africa. Now the Reality." *The Guardian*. London, 25th April 2007.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

8 relied upon, harnesses charity branding in an unprecedented manner. Product Red employs ethical consumerism and celebrity activism in a more sophisticated campaign, and thus needs exploring in some detail.

In 2006, pop star and self-professed philanthropist Bono co-founded Product Red with philanthropist Bobby Shriver. The premise of Product Red, vague as it may seem, is to "help save lives in Africa." A number of leading corporations participate in the Red branding campaign; through their participation, American Express, Apple, Converse, Dell, Emporio Armani, Gap, Hallmark, Starbucks, Windows, and most recently, NIKE, not only receive free advertising by Product Red, but get to participate in an ethical business model that "makes good business sense." There is no attempt to hide the benefits for consumers or corporations, the former who benefit by gaining visibility and having their choices (and perhaps, by extension, voices) heard, and the latter who gain economically.

Unlike previous campaigns that employ charity branding as a necessity to raise money and awareness, Product Red is nothing but charity branding. The Red manifesto puts this most clearly when it states:

> As first world consumers, we have tremendous power. What we collectively choose to buy or not to buy, can change the course of life and history on this planet […] We believe that when consumers are offered this choice [to buy from charitable corporations], and the products meet their needs, they will choose (RED). And when they choose (RED) over non-(RED), then more brands will choose to become (RED) because it will make good business sense to do so. And more lives will be saved. (RED) is not a charity. It is simply a business model.[29]

Here Product Red places all the emphasis on consumers, arguing that consumers have the power not only to purchase Product Red products, which results in corporations donating part of their profits to the distribution of retroviral medicines to Africans with HIV and AIDS, but also to influence whether or not corporations participate in ethical consumer business models. According to the manifesto, consumers have as much power over their own economies and corporate policies, as they do over their own consumer choices. But the consumer does nothing without the help of the friendly corporation, supported by the charitable celebrity activist who is both a business and Africa "expert." At the same

[29] "The (Red) Manifesto" July 2007. *Vanity Fair.* 139.

time, however, the consumer gets to wear (in the case of clothing and electronic accessories) her or his own badge of ethical consumerism. The consumer becomes, like the corporation, marked by the color red; a color that, as the Product Red website claims, "unites us."

Unification of consumers, corporations, and Africans through the color red once again supports the one-world notion of charity explained by Myron Magnet. What such a vision of oneness misses, however, is the fact that African peoples are not wearing or using red products. For them, the red is a much less commodified and much more visceral color: it is the color of blood. As Norma Anderson astutely asserts in "Shoppers of the World Unite: (RED)'s Messaging and Morality in the Fight Against AIDS in Africa," such a notion of unification—in particular the reference to Africans as "brothers and sisters"—creates "a perceived bond or commonality between groups […] [but does not] seek to connect us somehow to the folks it hopes to assist" (Anderson 2008: 41). Like the Ethiopia singles, The "Red Manifesto" constructs an imaginary recipient, an imaginary African, that—in being just like us, but considerably distant from us—is a safe and non-threatening victim, a worthy charity case. This imaginary African has, since the colonial era, existed in the Western cultural imagination. In the literature of Joseph Conrad, the images of Teddy Roosevelt on safari in Africa, and in charity advertisements, Africans have almost always been depicted as mysterious figures, born of a dark and unknown land that represents untamed adventure to the civilizing white man.[30] Such a problematic representation of Africans and Africa goes unchallenged in the Product Red paraphernalia. In fact, it is more than supported by both the images of supposed aid recipients posted on the Product Red website and, more shockingly, in the rhetoric of Red's celebrity founder, Bono.

The stereotyping and elision of Africa and Africans becomes clear to anyone who examines the Red website—few actual images of Africans or testimonials of recipients exist, and when Africans do appear, they

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[30] For detailed discussions of the construction of Africa as adventure and untamed land throughout the colonial period to the era of late capitalism, see Mayer, Ruth, *Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in the Times of Globalization* (2002); Landau, Paul S., "Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Imagination in Africa" (2002), 141-71.

present very differently to the ideal Western Product Red consumer or celebrity.[31] In fact, as with previous campaigns, the African becomes elided by the celebrity and consumer. As Percy C. Hintzen explains, this is most evident in the 2007 special issue of *Vanity Fair* where a group of famous contributors (including Barack Obama, Maya Angelou, George Bush, and Bill Gates) "speak to the saving grace of Africa and to the continent's possibilities for human redemption" and, in doing so, "become transformed into the voices of Africa" (Hintzen 2008: 83), therefore superceding or eliding any African voices. Africans only exist as images in the world of Product Red.

Bono's rhetoric, the most egregious of all Red celebrity participants, serves to do nothing but promote Africa as an empty signifier, waiting to be provided both meaning and purpose. Like his fellow countryman and friend, Geldof, Bono also supports the call to "Make Poverty History" by freeing up trade with Africa. And yet his rhetoric would imply that the only reason to free Africa is to re-colonize it. Bono claims that, as member of a society undermined by colonialist legacy and policy, he feels empathy for Africa. Still, he continues to view Africa as an exploitable resource, as an unlimited labor force and potential market. For Bono, Africa is a capitalist "adventure" that, with the help of good Western consumer decision, can be a "mesmerizing, entrepreneurial" continent "where every street corner boasts an entrepreneur" (Hintzen, 80). Here, Africa is positioned in business terms. As on the Red website, and in the majority of 'Save Africa' charity texts, African people do not exist as anything other than, at best, statistics and stock images. They are either elided, or presented as imagined commodified goods to be redeemed through Western sacrifice.

Arguably such images of Africa serve a purpose for the West. Presenting Africa as helpless victim, and celebrity activists as white men willing to take up the burden to save a continent dying from the lack of entrepreneurial spirit, does little but aggrandize celebrity figures. Not only do stars such as Bono and Geldof gain by presenting themselves as saviors of a dying continent, but as Teresa Barnes indicates, such

[31] For a full discussion of depictions of Africans on the Product Red website, see Anderson, Norma, "Shopper of the World Unite: (RED)'s Messaging and Morality in the Fight Against AIDS" (2008), 38-39.

philanthropic stars also perform this task in ways that force both members of the charitable public and intended recipients of aid to give them thanks. Barnes persuasively argues that, through their letter writing and rhetoric, both Bono and co-founder of Red, Bobby Shriver, prove that "the egos of the rich must be continually stroked by the poor" (Barnes 2008: 74). She goes on to wittily remark that "Gim(me) the love, should be the motto of these circuses" (Barnes 2008:74).

Despite its multiple flaws, in particular the atrocious rhetoric used to sell Product Red by celebrities with questionable motives, the business model has been successful on many levels. Not only does the line of Product Red merchandise sell, some of its health aims have also been achieved. According to the Red website, by the end of 2009, the "amount of funds generated by (RED) […] [was] the equivalent of providing more than 890,000 people with lifesaving anti-retroviral therapy for a year." The Global Fund—a NGO established in 2002 with the help of Kofi Anan, supported by Product RED—"have averted more than 3.5 million deaths by providing AIDS treatment for 2 million people, TB treatment for 4.6 million people, and by the distribution of 70 million insecticide-treated bed nets for the prevention of malaria worldwide."[32] One other positive effect of Product Red, is the fact the business model and accompanying Global Fund have the potential to change African government attitudes and policies on AIDS management and education. As Teresa Barnes argues in "Product Red: The Marketing of African Misery," critics of the business model may:

> be silenced by the argument that even if pills are not the sole answer and even if their use will not "help eliminate" AIDS in Africa, they will alleviate the suffering of HIV-positive people who would die without them. In South Africa, where the goal of treating and beating back the disease has been indelibly and probably fatally marked by official viral denialism at the highest levels of government, this, finally, is a compelling argument. (Barnes 2008: 74)

While the flaws of Red, particularly with regards to the fetishization and commodification of Africa, are obvious, it is also necessary to see how ethical consumerism can be read in a more positive light and not

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[32] The Persuaders, "How Red Works" (2006). See <http://www.joinred.com/Learn/HowRedWorks/GlobalFund1.aspx>.

simply because a certain number of African men, women, and children have been provided the medication they need. I would also argue that, while we must be willing to provide constructive criticism, celebrity activism and ethical consumerism should not be taken too lightly. Both have become so entrenched within Western notions of charity, that it would be difficult to separate them in today's economy.[33] Westerners need to recognize how imperialist rhetoric—and sometimes shear ignorance—are problematic and detrimental to the welfare of African peoples and nations; but it would be unwise to abandon such consumer models completely.

Conclusion

In 1984, Stuart Hall condemned the Left for dismissing the cultural significance and charitable abilities of the Band Aid and Live Aid endeavors in England. Hall argues that, unlike the Right, which, having realized its potential, quickly jumped on the famine relief bandwagon, the Left were slow to recognize the potential socio-cultural power of the famine relief movement (Hall 1988: 257). For the most part, the Left remained aloof from the 1984-5 famine relief movement, on the one hand, because of a snobbish disregard for mass culture and, on the other hand, because of concerns over the movement's ethnocentric and imperialist underpinnings. While the criticisms of ethnocentrism and profiteering lodged at Geldof and his co-activists are indeed grounded in accuracy, it should be possible to move beyond such narrow critiques and recognize that, for all its downfalls, the movement did have a number of positive outcomes for some Ethiopians and for many participants and sponsors in the West. When considering the failures and successes of famine relief, one must acknowledge how, as a *mass* movement, the famine relief movement could only affect a certain amount of change, within the confines of the culture that produced it.

[33] According to James Douglas, the late capitalist era saw the emergence of "voluntary and philanthropic organization as the Third Sector" (Douglas 1983: 11). By the 1980s, charity had not only become business throughout the West, but a growth industry in numerous parts of the world, and a sector that influences the compassionate nature of Westerners.

While we may be disheartened by the apparent conservativeness of results, we should not discount any campaign—branded or not—for failing to affect a revolution.

One of the biggest problems that arises from both academics' and from the Left's critique of mass movement and popular culture in general, is the critics' inability to account for the pleasure that popular texts can elicit from audiences, and the subversive power of pleasure itself. Through their involvement in the famine relief movement and subsequent celebrity inspired, ethical consumer campaigns, the participants gained both a voice and a sense of agency. Unlike the Leftist intellectuals that critiqued their behavior, ethical consumer participants at least recognized that, through the consumption of mass culture and their collusion with media and multinational corporations, they could simultaneously garner pleasure and become active global subjects and agents of change. If we were to take this option away from many in the West who feel, rightly or wrongly, as disenfranchised as the starving and sick Africans with whom they identify, then we would effectively disempower a group that already feels marginalized.

For all three 'Save Africa' campaigns examined here, there were multiple beneficiaries. Organizers, celebrity participants, corporate sponsors, event planners and providers of event equipment and locations, ethical consumers, and, to some extent, the intended recipients of aid have all gained in ways inconceivable without the help of the 1984-5 famine relief movement, Live 8 and "Make Poverty History," and Product Red. Should such campaigns, or celebrity activism and ethical consumerism in general, be condemned simply because multiple people benefit?

The difference between the models examined in this paper, and more traditional philanthropic campaigns, is the contemporary campaign's emphasis upon the relationship between pleasure, entertainment, and charity. Such a relationship, alongside advancements in technology, has led to the broadening of scope of charity campaigns, and often allows more people with access to philanthropic pursuits. While the scope and accessibility has served in some ways to support the problematic one-world view proposed by many celebrity inspired, ethical consumer campaigns; it has also proven that, as human beings, we can imagine a shared bond, a bond that prevents us from exploiting not only other humans, but the environment on which we all rely to live. The ways in which certain people and corporations have profited economically from their involvement in 'Save Africa' campaigns is, at times, abhorrent. However, it seems unrealistic to assume that organizers and sponsors of events such as Live Aid and Live 8 are willing to do something for nothing. While it is important to acknowledge that celebrity profiteering through activism is rife, and to highlight the problems resulting from the contradictory motives and messages of those multi-national corporate sponsors involved in charitable events; it seems naïve to dismiss outright the economic and cultural role of celebrity activism or ethical consumerism in the West. In fact, it is nothing but shortsighted to completely condemn models of fund and consciousness-raising that provide charities with such immense possibilities to garner support, and donors the opportunity to participate as members of a global community.

Arguably, it is not the celebrity inspired, ethical consumer models that is the problem with such campaigns. The problems arise from the ways in which Africa and Africans are almost always constructed within the Western cultural imagination. In order to affect real change on the most exploited continent in the world, we must change the mythos surrounding Africa. Africa has, since the colonial era, functioned as an empty space upon which we play out Western entrepreuneurial and/or philanthropic fantasies. Such a function within the Western cultural imagination has allowed for the exploitation of African peoples, environments, resources, and fauna for the past 600 years. Not until attitudes towards Africa and African peoples have changed, not until African people are presented as central to the future of Africa and significant to campaigns designed to aid Africa, will such models become truly effective. Celebrity activists can be educated. Ethical consumerism can be truly ethical. And campaigns that capitalize on celebrity and consumerism can be beneficial to Africans in need of aid.

This article began with the question: what are we feeding the world? While it would seem that much of the fodder is imperialist, capitalist rhetoric, it is necessary to concede that many in both the West and the Third World are also finding sustenance as a result of celebrity activism and ethical consumer practices. Of course, whether or not such ethical consumer based responses to catastrophe in the Third World can be sustained in a world of rapidly declining resources and continuous economic decline is a topic for lengthier discussion.

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Pretty in Pink: The Susan G. Komen Network and the Branding of the Breast Cancer Cause

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The pink ribbon is a ubiquitous fixture on the consumer landscape of contemporary America. Emerging over the last two decades as the symbol for the fight being waged against breast cancer, the color and image now adorn packaging for everything from trash bags to cosmetics, cereal to cleaning products, postage stamps to guacamole. The already pink Energizer bunny now dons a pink ribbon as he keeps going and going to fight breast cancer as well as power the nation's electronic devices. The National Football League donned pink during October 2009 in support of October's National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and Muslim women veiled themselves in pink hijabs for the annual Global Pink Hijab Day at the end of October.[1]

Aging baby boomers, those most at risk from the disease can now write with, drink out of, sleep under, read with, and indulge their inner chocoholics with products designed to remind them of that threat. This blitzkrieg of cause marketing, spearheaded by the Susan G. Komen Network and its army of corporate sponsors is admittedly taking the fight to this dread disease. The plethora of pink ribbons to be found in virtually every shopping venue represents a marketing bonanza for those corporations savvy enough or committed enough to jump on board the Komen bandwagon. The millions of dollars that have been raised to fight breast cancer are unquestionable evidence of an ardent desire to eradicate this disease. The invasion of the pink ribbon into the visual lexicon of virtually every American adult has raised awareness of the disease, a vital step in the detection and treatment of most cancers. Despite all this apparent good however, manifested in dollars for research and

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[1] For more details on these campaigns go to the NFL A Crucial Catch site at www.NFL.com/pink and the Global Pink Hijab Day official site at http://www.pinkhijabday.net/.

cognizance of the need for exams and screening, the pink ribbon phenomenon spearheaded by the Susan G. Komen machine reveals much darker realities about American marketing, consumerism, philanthropy, gender relations, and the perils of branding. The Komen brand has achieved virtually unrivaled cachet in the philanthropic world. With all of this quasi-consumer success however, has come all the pitfalls inherent in such success. This analysis will show that while philanthropic brands must undertake many of the same strategies for success as corporate brands, and while philanthropic brands are not immune to the problems facing corporate brands, their cultural resonance and ultimate non-capitalist orientation do afford them a more readily earned and maintained social legitimacy than their corporate counterparts. This raises the question, are the capitalist strategies of corporate branding prettier in pink?

Background

Susan G. Komen the network takes its name from Susan G. Komen the woman and breast cancer victim who died of the disease in 1980. Out of her sister Nancy Brinker's grief came the organization that has shone a brighter light on the tragedy of breast cancer than any other advocacy group in the country.[2] Additionally, because Brinker's focus was always on her sister and her sister's memory, the network gave a face to the disease.[3] At a time when breast cancer was discussed in hushed tones and treated with a certain taboo by its victims, their families, and the public

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[2] The Porter Prize is an annual prize given by the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. Ms. Brinker received this honor in recognition of her work at the helm of Susan G. Komen for the Cure (Collins 2009).

[3] Breast cancer remains the most prevalent form of cancer to afflict women. About 207,090 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in women in the United States in 2010 and about 40,000 will die (Breast Cancer Statistics). There are 2.5 million people alive today who have survived the illness. The World Health Organization estimated that there are 519,000 deaths worldwide from the disease (Fact Sheet No. 297). That reality and those numbers should serve as a backdrop for all that is said here.

at large, the Komen Network, building upon the work done by former first lady, Betty Ford, removed the stigma, started the conversation, and prompted a complete reversal in pubic perceptions and attitudes. Today breast cancer is an openly discussed part of American culture with the month of October devoted yearly to its eradication in the United States for nearly a quarter century.

With Susan G. Komen as the personification of breast cancer's everywoman, the network launched its advocacy efforts in 1982. Prior to launching the network, Brinker had been a member of the executive training program for Neiman Marcus, a talk-show host, and a director of public relations for the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dallas. More recently, Brinker served as United States Ambassador to Hungary and Chief of Protocol in the George W. Bush Administration (Leone 2009). She took her experience and success in the corporate arena and applied it to the non-profit sector. The result was the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (which changed its name to Susan G. Komen for the Cure in 2007), an organization that boasts more than 100,000 volunteers working through a network of 125 United States and international affiliates (Collins 2009).

The structure and attitude of the network as well as its unparalleled success reveal sometimes unfortunate realities of corporate America and women's place in it as much as they reflect the tragedy of breast cancer. Nancy Brinker set out to found an organization of women for women in which they would be empowered, not just to fight a disease intimately associated with femininity, but to run a multi-million dollar, multi-national organization committed to the eradication of that disease. According to the Susan G. Komen for the Cure website, "we're proud of the fact that we don't simply dump funds and run. We create activists – one person, one community, one state, one nation at a time – to try and solve the number one health concern of women" (Brinker 2010).

The Network's claim that breast cancer is the "number one health concern of women" alludes to both the character and critique of the Komen Network's activism. By the numbers, breast cancer should not be the number one health concern of women. According to the American Heart Association half of all women who will die this year will die from heart disease or stroke; 500,000 per year compared to 40,000 from breast cancer. Yet 67% of women name breast cancer as their biggest health concern compared to 7% for heart disease and 1% for stroke (Mosca et al. 2003). Thus, breast cancer is the health threat about which women are most aware. Additionally, though men can get and are getting breast cancer in increasing numbers, the disease is generally perceived of as a female affliction. Thus, breast cancer activism targets women and when it reaches out to men, as it frequently does, it is typically in the context of helping women. Women have been victimized by breast cancer but spouses, fathers, brothers, and sons can take up the fight to protect and/or save women from this disease by participating in breast cancer philanthropy.

The Komen for the Cure website claims that every major advance in the fight against breast cancer has been touched by the network, its people, and its advocacy. Komen for the Cure has "helped train more than 400 breast cancer researchers and funded more than 1,800 research projects over the past 26 years." They have provided more money for breast cancer research and community health programs than any entity besides the United States government, and Komen for the Cure's goal is to "energize science to find the cures" ("Why Komen?"). The Komen Network has raised 1.3 billion dollars for research, education, and health services. Today Komen for the Cure has members and conducts activities in over 50 countries.[4]

The measure of Komen for the Cure's success in the battle against breast cancer is found as surely in these numbers of billions of dollars raised for research as in the survivorship rates of those stricken with the disease. In these two sets of numbers, we see the two faces of the Komen organization. The former is the face of high finance and corporate America where the skills Nancy Brinker honed in her for-profit past have been put to good use in her not-for-profit present. These numbers encompass an advertising/marketing juggernaut in which dozens of high profile national sponsors help Komen for the Cure raise millions annually to continue its work against breast cancer. Komen's Million Dollar Council, for example, is comprised of twenty businesses with million dollar annual contributions. Corporations such as Avon, General Electric, Bristol Myers Squibb, Ford Motors, and Lee Jeans are among

[4] To review where Susan G. Komen For the Cure stands on Breast Cancer Research, Early Detection, Access to Quality Care, and Health Reform issues go to http://www.komenadvocacy.org/content.aspx?id=58.

the ranks of Komen's corporate sponsors (Million Dollar Sponsor). On the other end of the philanthropic/activist spectrum are the tens of thousands of grassroots volunteers, many of them breast cancer survivors, who take the Komen message from Wall Street to Main Street and personalize the battle being waged against this disease. It is through the efforts of this latter group, the everyday activists, that the Komen Network achieves and maintains much of its social legitimacy, a legitimacy sometimes threatened and even eroded through corporate sponsorship.

Grassroots activism

Many of the everyday pink ribbon volunteers, participants in the Komen for the Cure activities, and consumers of the Pink Ribbon products are motivated to participate in Komen's quest for a cure for breast cancer because the disease has personally affected them. The Race for the Cure events are annual events held in scores of cities around the country and likely the most well known and most effective elements of their advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. They attract some serious runners and tens of thousands of walkers. Each participant's admission and/or pledges provide the basis of the fundraising effort. Equally important to the revenue raised however, is the politicized character of the races that take on many of the sociological characteristics of a march as opposed to a fun run. The racers occupy a public space. By their sheer numbers and location they garner media and popular attention. Additionally, due to the prominent place afforded current patients and survivors in the races, they are truly empowering events that succeed in turning an everyday activity and its participants, into activists marching for a cure. As evidence of the widespread success of the Races for the Cure, Komen announced on March 10, 2009 the first annual Global Race for the Cure. The Global Race for the Cure funds breast cancer programs for the medically underserved throughout the National Capital Area and abroad ("International Races").

The runners and walkers in the dozens of Races for the Cure that take place annually remind all who see them of the human tragedy that is cancer and as such form a crucial moral and empathetic bulwark of the Komen for the Cure initiatives. It is unquestionable that the Komen Network could not have reached its present level of success without the invaluable assistance of the members of its Million Dollar Council, but it is these tens of thousands of runners and walkers that form the socio-cultural structure upon which the marketing campaigns of the iconic Komen brand find resonance with American consumers. As shall be discussed below, the pink ribbon affixed to the box of cereal or bottle of detergent prompt us the American consumer to purchase said cereal or detergent not because it symbolizes the corporate beneficence of Kellogg's or Tide, but because it reminds us all of the mothers, daughters, sisters, friends who have been afflicted by this disease and those who run or walk on their behalf or perhaps in their memory every year. As we shall see, the corporate component of the Komen agenda is formidable and lucrative, but much of that strength and success rests on the individuals whom the disease has affected and who take to the streets to march for the cure.

Marketing a disease

When the noble actions of these running, walking, buying activists are juxtaposed with the far more questionable actions of corporate profiteering, the Komen for the Cure organization becomes the subject of greater scrutiny and the focus of legitimate criticism. The Komen Network has been questioned, even vilified for a marketing strategy that at best makes it a pawn to the corporate mandate and at worst makes it complicit in the manipulation of American consumer behavior and philanthropic impulse. Those that question it point out that Komen is profiting from a disease that it claims it wants to eradicate. If this disease is indeed eradicated, how will the Komen Network sustain itself? Inherent in all the philanthropic rhetoric surrounding the organization is this "conflict of interest" and the fact that the organization is using for profit corporate marketing strategies and making millions of dollars. To understand its conflicted polarity and the development of this conflict of interest, we must examine the history of the Susan G. Komen brand, the nature and meaning of iconic brands, the unique characteristics of branding in the non-profit and/or philanthropic sector, and the cultural context within which all of this occurs and exists.

The branding of Komen for the Cure made it the organization it is today. As an advertising executive Nancy Brinker was well aware of the power of a brand. Ad agency founder David Ogilvy's, definition of a brand is "the intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it's advertised" (Quoted in Dvorak 2009: 10). A brand is a promise that a product or an organization makes to its constituency. It is successful by making an emotional connection to a target audience (Dahlén et al. 2010: 195). The genius of the Susan G. Komen brand is that it taps into highly emotional issues. Founder Nancy Brinker used the name and memory of her dead sister to start this organization and launch its activism. The power of this message is that most Americans can relate to the loss of a loved one or have lived with the fear of such a loss.

One of Komen for the Cure's attributes is its logo or trademark, the pink ribbon, which is the centerpiece of its brand. According to published reports the pink breast cancer ribbon was originally peach. In the early 1990s, 68-year old Charlotte Haley, whose mother, grandmother, and sister had all had breast cancer, made peach-colored loops at her dining room table. She distributed the ribbons in sets of five along with a card that said: "The National Cancer Institute annual budget is $1.8 billion, only 5 percent goes for cancer prevention. Help us wake up our legislators and America by wearing this ribbon."[5]

In a truly grassroots campaign to defeat breast cancer, Haley passed out cards in her community, wrote to prominent women, and spread her message by word-of-mouth. *Self Magazine* asked Ms. Haley if they could take her peach ribbon campaign national, but she did not want her crusade to bring awareness to the cause to become too commercial. To avoid legal trouble, *Self Magazine's* attorney advised it to use another color; and they chose pink. In 1991, pink ribbons were handed out at the

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[5] Komen is routinely criticized for supporting research for a cure to the detriment or virtual exclusion of funding for preventative measures. However, as the story of Charlotte Haley and her peach loops reflects, Komen is not alone in this perspective or the critique of it. Haley was taking a purposeful political step and asking all those who received a peach loop to do the same. Her goal was not to promote exams or mammography, but to enlist thousands of recruits in a Capital Hill budget battle over the allocation of funds. While her efforts were ultimately eclipsed by the Komen Network and a variety of other breast cancer advocacy organizations, her prescience in identifying a basic and ongoing flaw in the governmental response to cancer is undeniable (Fernandez 1998).

Race for the Cure in New York City. In 1992, *Self Magazine*, in partnership with Estee Lauder, launched its pink breast cancer ribbon campaign. Estee Lauder distributed 1.5 million ribbons along with laminated cards describing how to conduct breast self-examination. Within the year, the peach ribbons were forgotten (Fernandez 1998).

Of course, the ribbon is a symbol that dates back decades and was for much of its iconographic history associated with the return of soldiers from war. Similarly the color pink has been associated with femininity since the 1940s though more directly associated with infants and children than with adult women. Thus, the fusion of the ribbon and the color pink became one of the most potent branding symbols in modern marketing. Komen adopted a familiar advertising technique by using an already popularized symbol, making it their own, and expanding its influence in the consumer marketplace.

When this technique is used successfully to create a symbol that resonates widely in the marketplace it is said to have acquired brand recognition. When this recognition increases to a point where there is enough positive attitude and response to it in the culture in which it exists, it is said to have achieved brand franchise. The Pink Ribbon campaign can be said to have reached brand franchise proven by the shear fact that 67% of women said that breast cancer is their number one health concern when, as mentioned previously, the health statistics do not support that this should be so. As a brand's franchise grows, if its attributes are such and conditions are right, it can become an iconic brand. An iconic brand is a brand that is so successful that it takes on a larger meaning than simply symbolizing a product, company, or service. An iconic brand symbolizes a belief system, shared experience, or emotion widely held in a particular society (Holt 2004: 1). Examples of iconic brands include Harley Davidson Motorcycles, Coca Cola, and McDonalds.

Susan G. Komen for the Cure has followed what Douglas Holt, author of *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (2004) called the cultural branding model to achieve iconic branding status (Holt 2004: 36). First, the organization began by addressing a contradiction in our society: the notion that very few dollars were being devoted to breast cancer research and yet each year 200,000 people became victims of the disease. Second, the organization's belief that the disease can and will be completely eradicated has provided a positive outlet for much of the fear and anxiety surrounding this deadly disease and has perpetuated a necessary story or myth upon which a brand develops. By using a personal tragedy to convey a need, Komen and its cause-marketing partners have helped to establish the cultural relevance of the pink ribbon specifically and the breast cancer cause more generally. Third, wearing the pink ribbon or buying a pink ribbon adorned product has provided society with a ritual action in which people can participate and do their part, helping to buy into the belief that the disease will be eradicated.

Having achieved iconic brand status, the Susan G Komen Network has been able to raise over $30 million dollars a year since the early 2000s through an advertising and marketing technique known as cause marketing. Cause marketing is a type of marketing that involves a non-profit organization joining forces with for profit businesses. One of the first examples of this was when the March of Dimes teamed up with the Marriot Corporation in 1976 for the opening of a 200-acre family entertainment facility called Marriott's Great America. The complex was in Santa Clara, California but the campaign was held in 67 cities throughout the Western United States. This campaign broke all fundraising records for the Western Chapters of the March of Dimes, and it provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in free publicity for the successful opening of the Marriott entertainment complex. Bruce Burtch conceived of the program and went on to coin the phrase, "Do Well by Doing Good" (Burtch).

Over the last two decades, "cause-related marketing" and "cause marketing" have continued to grow as a means for product sales, promotions, and collaborations between companies and nonprofit causes. From 1990 to 1998 businesses involved in cause marketing increased over 400 percent. In recent years companies have made more long-term commitments to causes. These companies are what industry expert Carol Cone today calls "cause branders," companies that take a long-term, stake holder-based approach to integrating social issues into business strategy, brand equity, and organized identity.[6]

[6] The 1999 Cone/Roper Cause Related Trend Report found that given a choice, 78 percent of adults said they would be more likely to buy a product associated with a cause they care about, 66 percent said they'd switch brands to support a

Susan G. Komen for the Cure has based much of their donation generation on this technique. They have received over $30 million a year through corporate sponsorships. Their website lists over 185 corporate partners with almost as many programs for October 2009 alone. One can click on each program and get detailed facts on the partnership, its fiscal provisions and history, and its contribution to the Komen cause. For instance, the Energizer Family of Brands launched a Joining for the Cure platform in 2009 at the retail level. Through this combined effort Energizer will be making a contribution to Komen for the Cure for $400,000. Beginning July 1, 2009 Schick, through the Quattro for Women brand, will donate an additional $50,000 from a free music download promotion ("Corporate Partners").[7]

Criticism: slacktivism and pinkwashing

The Komen Network's significant success with cause marketing both in terms of the number of corporate sponsorships and the amount of revenue generated however, has led some to question its methods and criticize its efforts. Such critiques have come from within the ranks of consumer advocates and industry watchdog organizations and as well as from those who share Komen's goal of curing breast cancer. The organization Breast Cancer Action, for example, has responded to the use of cause marketing and corporate profiting from the pink campaign by

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cause, 61 percent said they'd switch retailers to support a cause, and 54 percent would pay more for a product that supported a cause they care about (McConnell 2007: 70).

[7] For other examples of cause related marketing see Sokol. Komen's hold on female boomers and corporations eager to reach them however has sometimes been eroded by Komen's support of controversial organizations like Planned Parenthood. Komen's support for Planned Parenthood is rooted in the broad spectrum of female health services their clinics provide including breast cancer screenings for low-income women. When Komen refused to stop funding Planned Parenthood, the pro-life owner of the Curves fitness chain withdrew his financial support for the organization. Ironically, regular exercise is and has been a proven preventative measure for breast and several other kinds of cancers, but abortions like those provided by Planned Parenthood have been known to increase the risk of breast cancer in women (Stanek 2010).

creating a project called *Think Before You Pink*. The *Think Before You Pink* campaign has questioned many of the motives and tactics of organizations such as Komen for the Cure. The BCA has accused Komen and like organizations of slacktivism and pinkwashing tactics and calls for transparency and accountability in companies that participate in these efforts ("Think Before You Pink").

The Urban Dictionary defines Slacktivism as "the act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem." Slacktivism applies to both individual activity and collective action. The latter is large-scale industrial-perpetrated slacktivism, which is highly planned, professionally coordinated and intended to advance a self-serving industrial agenda. Corporate-sponsored slacktivism is, in short, "implemented to stop social change that could, in the long run, be crucial to society's long-term well-being" (Landman 2008a).

Slacktivism dates back to the mid 1980s when the tobacco industry undertook a campaign to derail efforts to ban smoking in public places by promoting segregation of smokers into smoking sections in restaurants and other like facilities. Clearly limitations on public smoking would have had adverse effects on the tobacco company's profitability, but to oppose the bans outright would have been to provoke popular backlash sustained by indignation at the obviously self-serving motives of the companies. So, in order to avoid such a backlash, the tobacco companies, led by Philip Morris, got out ahead of the issue and suggested and then supported the smoking section alternative, labeling it as progress and reform (Landman 2008a). If one thinks through the logic of smoking sections or recalls passing through a smoking section to reach a non-smoking section, the futility of attempting to confine smoke to one section of an open space is apparent. Nonetheless smoking sections are still used in some locales more than two decades later and in those intervening two decades, the cigarette companies were able to maintain the social acceptability of smoking in public and reap the profits therein.

Other slacktivist campaigns followed and included the effort to recycle plastic shopping bags promoted by the companies that manufactured said bags and the American Chemistry Council in order to make an end run around environmentalists who sought to restrict the use of plastic bags altogether (Landman 2008a). Students of slacktivism add the Susan G. Komen phenomenon to this list because of the network's successful integration of corporate incentive and individual philanthropy as manifested in the ubiquity of the pink ribbon.

In considering slacktivism one must place blame where blame is due. Slacktivism is a product of corporate malfeasance. Its victims however are the average citizens who are duped by such campaigns. “Most slacktivist individuals are probably genuinely well-meaning people who just don’t take the time to think about the value, or lack thereof, of their actions. They’re looking for an easy way to feel like they’re making a difference – how damaging is it to wear a rubber wristband or slap a magnetic ribbon on your car?” (Landman 2008a). For producer and consumer alike “donating by making a purchase is a really seductive idea” (Stukin 2006).

Komen has also come under fire for a related practice called pinkwashing, a quasi-philanthropic marketing strategy and form of slacktivism where corporations put the Komen brand on their products and give the organization a share of proceeds from the sales of said products. Pinkwashing has become a $30 million a year moneymaker for the Komen Network and has contributed significantly to public awareness of the disease and the effort to cure it. As the name implies, however, pinkwashing is not without its critics. These critics generally fall into two camps.

The first group point out the limited profitability of these campaigns for Komen relative to their substantial profitability for the corporate sponsors. These critics further contend that committed citizens would be better off donating directly to Komen than indirectly through these third parties whose primary mandate is profit, not charity. For example, consider Yoplait’s donation compared to the profit the corporation makes in the name of charity. Yoplait donates 10 cents for every pink yogurt lid mailed back to the company. They guarantee a minimum of $500,000 and cap donations at $1.5 million. Yoplait is owned by General Mills, which did $10.1 billion in sales in 2008. Fifteen percent of those sales come from the Yoplait brand. Therefore, if Yoplait contributes the full $1.5 million that still only represents .10% of their net sales. Obviously using the Komen name has been successful since General Mills plans to expand their production capacity in 2010 with the growth of the Yoplait brand. When one considers it would take buying over 100 yogurts to make a $10 contribution, the viability of pinkwashing for corporate

America is revealed. Questions as to why consumers do not simply make a direct donation remain (Reisman 2007).

Similarly, when Campbell's Soup changed their labels to pink from red in October to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, their contribution to Komen was $250,000. However the actual amount contributed works out to 3.5 cents a can (Buchanan 2006). Barbara Brenner, executive director of Breast Cancer Action, told Newsweek: "Everyone's been guilt-tripped into buying pink things. If shopping could cure breast cancer, it would be cured by now" (Quoted in Venezia 2010).

Komen's corporate partners are using support for breast cancer research to market products. Problematically, some of these products actually cause cancer and have been linked to breast cancer in particular. For example, BMW's Ultimate Drive will donate $1 per mile when people test-drive their cars. In Anne Landman's article "Pinkwashing: Can Shopping Cure Breast Cancer" (2008), the author points out, "it ignores the fact that the campaign encourages more and unnecessary driving, not to mention that automobile exhaust contains polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, harmful chemicals known to cause cancer" (2008b). BMW is profiting from its association with the pink ribbon and as this case reveals "breast cancer has been transformed into a market-driven industry. It has become more about making money for corporate sponsors than funding innovative ways to treat breast cancer" (Samantha King quoted in Adams 2007).

On BCA's *Think Before you Pink* website, they advocate and provide a list of ways to take action against breast cancer that do not involve shopping. Their list includes using public transportation because pollution is one of the risk factors for breast cancer. They also recommend using non-rGBH dairy products for their role in reducing risk. Again this highlights the possible syncopation in the anti breast cancer movement from Komen's focus on cure rather than prevention. BCA speaks out against pinkwashing. They guide consumers to ask basic questions before buying such products. These questions include: how much of the purchase price will be donated and where is it going? What programs do the recipients fund? Is there a cap on donations? What does the company offering the pink ribbon product do to make sure that they are not adding to the problem of breast cancer ("Think Before You Pink")?

A second group of critics reject pinkwashing on more philosophical grounds contending that philanthropic schemes such as these undermine not only popular commitment to substantive social action but also reinforce traditional gendered power relations by targeting women as consumers. For instance, when Campbell Soup changed its label from red to pink last October to support Breast cancer month, its sales doubled. Campbell spokesman John Faulkner said, “We certainly think there is the possibility of greater sales since our typical soup consumers are women and breast cancer is a cause they’re concerned about.” He went on to say that he would “love to see the program expanded greatly next year” with other retail partners (Thompson 2006).

Interestingly, even though pinkwashing efforts seem to be targeted at consumers who are mostly women, breast cancer is personified not by the real life women struggling to cope with the disease, but by a small pink ribbon that can be affixed to any number of products. A commodity is something that has value in exchange. To commodify something is to artificially give it value in exchange. Breast cancer and the hardship and heartache it brings have been given value, $30 million worth, in exchange. Komen’s corporate sponsors for all their rhetoric would be more likely to maintain their current profitability were no cure to be found.[8]

[8] King makes this argument in *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* by pointing out that Astra Zeneca, the pharmaceutical company that makes Tamoxifen, the leading breast cancer drug, was the primary corporate sponsor behind the declaration of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in 1985 and controlled the production of all related materials. King further alleges that the more women are aware of the threat of breast cancer, the more women will get screened, the more screenings conducted, the more cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed, and the more doses of Tamoxifen will be sold. Additionally problematic is the fact that until 2000, Astra Zeneca was complicit in the production of petroleum-based herbicides that are known carcinogens with specific links to breast cancer (King 2006: xx-xxi).

Conclusion

From the outset, Komen for the Cure has been committed to finding a cure for breast cancer. While a laudable and certainly desirable goal, it stands apart from other related goals including raising awareness (which has actually occurred as a by-product of Network activity), discovering the cause or causes of the disease, and working on prevention techniques. For Komen the entire focus is on research for the cure and as a result, other breast cancer advocacy groups have criticized the network for not putting more of its vast resources into cause and prevention research. From a personal as well as societal perspective, preventing disease is as legitimate if not more legitimate than searching for a cure. Perhaps in response to this criticism, in 2008 Komen reexamined its research focus towards addressing the translation of this knowledge into "treatment, early detection and prevention" ("Research Grant Programs"). Regardless, the Komen Network is the big kid on the block and no other organization, with the possible exception of the umbrella organization, the American Cancer Society, comes close to Komen in name recognition or fundraising. And of course the American Cancer Society, divides its research and advocacy dollars among all types of cancers.

As mentioned previously, a slight deviation between agenda and outcome in the work of the Komen Network is detectable. Komen's agenda has been to eradicate the disease by finding a cure. The result, however, has been a huge sales boost for corporations willing to join the cause marketing bandwagon as well as a greater public awareness of the disease and its consequences. The high profile and impressively successful Race for the Cure campaign exemplifies an unintended consequence of Komen activism. Initially intended as a fundraising tool, thanks to widespread popular support, the Races for the Cure have become that and much more. In addition to raising $4.3 million annually with estimated participation at 45,000 people nationwide, the races have become an outlet for female activism vis-à-vis breast cancer (Kurtianyk 2009). Women with no direct connection to the disease out of a sense of perhaps shared female solidarity and with the weighty recognition that someday any one of them could be benefactors of the work Komen provides participate. Others afflicted with the disease walk as a means of instilling or buffeting hope. Survivors walk for what is essentially a victory lap. And it is in the inspiration of the survivors that the Races take on perhaps their most obvious unintended consequence, a conscience-raising social movement alerting women to take control by getting regular checkups that could lead to life-saving early detection.

The challenge in analyzing the Susan G. Komen Network relative to the slacktivist phenomenon is to place the Network on the spectrum between the well-intentioned but uninformed individual activists and their corporate manipulators. The Komen Network is not a corporation. It is not a for-profit entity. It is an organization dedicated to a meritorious cause. It seeks to bring about a change, the cure for breast cancer, that would enhance society's overall long-term well-being.

This begs the question, is Komen complicit or co-opted, victim or victimizer, manipulator or manipulated in their embrace of corporate modalities, including cause marketing. Does the Komen organization undertake a pragmatic calculus to determine that while a direct donation was preferable to one through a third party as provided by soup labels or yogurt lids, the latter was preferable to no donation at all. Further, how do we calculate into this equation the importance of raising awareness about the disease and the credit that Komen and its pinkwashing corporate sponsors necessarily deserve for raising awareness about a disease for which early detection can make a life or death difference?

Problematically few if any of the pinkwashing breast cancer organizations and their corporate benefactors make any mention of disease prevention. A cynical analysis of this reality would suggest that prevention is not promoted because to find a cure is to end the pinkwashing raison d'être.

According to the Komen website though, the organization is making a difference. They call their members activists, advocates, and global citizens. Consider the following:

> nearly 75 percent of women over 40 years old now receive regular mammograms, the single most effective tool for detecting breast cancer early (in 1982, less than 30 percent received a clinical exam). The five-year survival rate for breast cancer, when caught early before it spreads beyond the breast, is now 98 percent (compared to 74 percent in 1982). The federal government now devotes more than $900 million each year to breast cancer research, treatment and prevention (compared to $30 million in 1982). America's 2.5 million breast cancers survivors, the largest group of cancer survivors in the U.S is a living testament to the power of society and science to save lives. ("Our Promise and Background")

Critics condemn Komen for pinkwashing and being complicit in slacktivism. There is as yet no universal cure for breast cancer, but the above statistics leave little doubt that the network succeeds in its goal of creating activists. Saving yogurt lids, selecting pink ribbon adorned products, wearing pink bracelets, affixing pink magnetic ribbons to one's car are all examples of everyday activism. While not pivotal in leading to a cure as yet, the increased awareness that comes from these actions undoubtedly leads women to be more diligent about examination and mammography. Whether born of slacktivism or more philanthropic notions of activism the result of their diligence is the same—tangible differences being made in the lives of thousands of women yearly. That is success, "one person, one community, one state, one nation [one survivor] at a time" (Brinker 2010).

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Patron Saint of Lost Causes, Live on the BBC: The Yes Men, Humour and the Possibility of Politics

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At midnight on December 3, 1984 a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India abruptly and without warning released 42 tonnes of lethal methyl isocyanate gas into the sleeping city. The official death toll released by the provincial Indian government was 3,787,[1] while estimates from other sources suggest that anywhere from 8-10,000 people died within the first 72 hours and up to an additional 25,000 in the years that followed from gas-related diseases.[2] This incident has since been referred to as the "Bhopal disaster" and remains the world's worst industrial disaster. Dow Chemical, the company which now owns Union Carbide, continues to deny any responsibility for the tragedy, reiterating on their website that they acquired Union Carbide's shares 16 years after it happened (and presuming that in purchasing a company one acquires only profits, shares and products, rather than existent corporate errors, missteps or worse).[3] On a website they maintain outlining the company's response to the disaster, Union Carbide also claims no responsibility for the disaster, instead highlighting the central role of Union Carbide India (a company that was in fact owned by Union Carbide) and private Indian stockholders.[4] In other words, Union Carbide worked to deflect blame onto India itself and highlights only what it sees as its extremely vigorous efforts to determine the cause of the leak, which was eventually decided could only have been deliberate sabotage.

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[1] Figure from the Madhya Pradesh governmental website: www.mp.gov.in/bgtrrdmp/relief.htm

[2] Figures from the Bhopal Medical Appeal website: www.bhopal.org

[3] For Dow Chemical's full statement in response to the disaster, see: http://www.dow.com/commitments/debates/bhopal/index.htm

[4] For Union Carbide's full statement in response to the disaster, see: http://www.bhopal.com/ucs.htm

Given this delicate manoeuvring around blame and responsibility, it was to a surprised TV audience that one Jude Finisterra, a purported representative of Dow Chemical, appeared on the BBC to offer an apology and to pledge a $12 billion dollar compensation and remuneration package to the people of Bhopal. The announcement came on the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal disaster and promised that Dow Chemical would liquidate one of its subsidiaries to supply the funds needed to clean up the site, which has since been leaking residual chemicals, and provide medical care and compensation to the survivors. For two hours the headline "Dow Chemical accepts full responsibility," was number one in the world; that is, until stocks plummeted by 4.2%, costing shareholders over 2 million dollars. Quickly, the corporation issued a retraction: the announcement was a hoax, a joke; there was no Jude Finisterra, and thus no compensation planned and no apology.

In fact, the announcement had been orchestrated by the Yes Men, a culture-jamming activist group that formed as part of the protests against the World Trade Organization that happened in Seattle in 1999. Made up of Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno (born Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, respectively), the Yes Men operate by building fake PR websites for multi-national corporations and waiting for unsuspecting conference organizers or journalists to solicit speaking engagements via these sites. To take just a couple of examples, they have been invited to speak as Exxon Mobile at the National Petroleum Council conference (where they handed out candles made of "human fat"—a new product they were suggesting be made from the victims of the global warming and pollution being perpetuated by the oil industry) and as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at a 2006 Gulf Coast Reconstruction conference (where they announced that HUD, rather than continuing to close down much needed public housing, would reopen housing projects that remain inexplicably closed, despite being intact and habitable).[5] Similarly, when the BBC stumbled upon the website dowethics.com and unwittingly extended an invitation to the Yes Men-as-Dow-Chemical-representatives to speak live on the news, Bichlbaum

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[5] For the Yes Men's account of all of their "hijinks," see: http://theyesmen.org/hijinks

accepted the invitation. Suiting up in one of his many thrift-store *cum* corporate guises, adopting the pseudonym Jude Finisterra—appropriately invoking both the patron saint of lost causes and the end of the earth, the Yes Men effected one of their most public and perhaps most far-reaching interventions to date.[6]

In this paper, I propose to analyze this infiltration of the news-media circuit in terms of its effort to leverage humour for political ends. Given the seriousness of the events that occurred in Bhopal, it might seem as though this focus at best takes up a marginal aspect of a momentary intervention in an ongoing and complex international dispute and at worst is a frivolous meditation on an incident that made light of an immense tragedy. I argue, however, that humour is central to the Yes Men's activist orientation and that their parodic approach demonstrates the complexities that emerge when humour and a specific political agenda join forces. Ultimately, the critique that the Yes Men disrespect human tragedy is made moot through the visibility they bring to an issue and the care they take to address the absurdity of the staggering human costs that are often rendered invisible in a neoliberal market. At the same time, their humour raises interesting questions about the limits and possibilities of humour in addressing political questions.

Before coming to these questions of politics and humour, however, it is necessary to address one of the key terms in this argument: humour. The Yes Men's intervention is not one that necessarily would have provoked laughter. If any kind of affective response can be imagined in response, it would be more likely a wry smile than a hearty guffaw. So why look at this instance of impersonation, this project in culture jamming, as humorous at all? Can something that is unlikely to cause laughter be called humour at all? I argue that the answer is yes, nor am I the first to make the point. One of the first thinkers to ponder humour, in 55 BCE, Cicero writes in *De Oratore* of a certain mode of humour which he calls "equivocal wit," noting that it "is of the most cutting kind [...] but it is not very often productive of great laughter" (Cicero 1840: 191). Much more recently, anthropologist Mary Douglas cautions: "It would

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[6] To read the Yes Men's full account of the intervention, see: http://theyesmen.org/hijinks/bbcbhopal

be wrong to suppose that the acid test of a joke is whether it provokes laughter or not" (Douglas 1999: 148). Instead, drawing from two of the seminal works in the field of humour studies—Henri Bergson's *Le rire* (first published 1899) and Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (first published in 1905)—Douglas notes that the study of humour has been centrally concerned with the *structure* of humour. Where Freud locates humour in the interplay between conscious and subconscious mind, specifically in the eruption of the latter as the former briefly relinquishes control, Bergson finds humour in instances in which the mechanical or automatic (and thus unspontaneous and unfree) takes over the human subject. Douglas deems the two theorists' similarity an understanding of the joke "as an attack on control" (Douglas 1999: 149). In her own work, Douglas expands on these structural understandings of humour to see it as a mode that is always operant within "the total social situation" (Douglas 1999: 148). Going further, Douglas explains that what the joke offers is "play upon form" that allows for the realization that "an accepted pattern has no necessity" (Douglas 1999: 150). For Douglas, jokes are a kind of "anti-rite:" they are congruent with social patterns, but in that congruence show that those patterns that seem fixed or "natural" are in fact arbitrary and contingent. In other words, jokes, or humour, demonstrate the incongruities that underlie myths of social congruence. Simon Critchley offers a tidy summary, suggesting that humour "lets us see the familiar defamiliarized, the ordinary made extraordinary and the real rendered surreal" (Critchley 2002: 10). This theory of humour as being produced out of incongruities, whether social or psychic, maps well onto the Yes Men's intervention on the BBC. The two often say the impetus behind their projects is to "change the world."[7] In other words, they seek to demonstrate that the patterns that condition social and economic structures are not inevitable or immutable—laughter, whether or not it occurs, is inessential to this humour.

Given that their project aligns so well with the function Mary Douglas assigns to joking, the Yes Men's use of this mode in communicating is perhaps not surprising. More than this, humour is

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[7] The title of their most recent documentary *The Yes Men Fix the World* (2009) is only one instance among many where they describe their activism in terms of changing or fixing the world.

expressly tied to their oft-repeated impulse: the idea of changing the world, or revolution. A central characteristic of Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of carnival, humour is one aspect that liberates the world of carnival from the official doctrines. Or, put another way, the process of demonstrating the contingency of social patterns that Douglas assigned to joking is seen in carnival as effecting a kind of liberation for the joker and its hearer not only through the revelation of contingency but also through a reversal of established norms. Bakhtin describes the world of carnival as "a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations" standing in opposition to the official "narrow-minded seriousness" of dominant medieval culture, as ruled by church and lords (Bakhtin 1984: 5, 3). In this effective reversal of the norms of official culture, carnival makes possible a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth" (Bakhtin 1984: 10). In keeping with this description, Umberto Eco later goes on to make the even bolder statement that "carnival is revolution" (Eco 1984: 2). Given the centrality of humour to carnival, it is thus possible to use these theories in order to posit carnivalesque humour as revolutionary, or at least as a mode that works to reverse established social patterns. The Yes Men's work indicates an investment in this notion of humour and its liberatory or revolutionary potential. When the two describe their mission as one of changing the world,[8] the Yes Men assume a moment of unveiling, a punchline that reveals the disjunction between the suffering of people in Bhopal and the massive profits and holdings of the multinational corporation who never publicly claimed responsibility for that suffering.

It is tempting to want to conclude an analysis of the Yes Men's use of humour here, with the corporate heads of Dow Chemical revealed as a group of neoliberal charlatans while a wide-eyed news-viewing audience looks on stunned and suddenly well-informed. However, Bakhtin makes an important distinction in his discussion of carnival—while folk humour pushes towards liberation, it is not actually liberation itself. Bakhtin describes the liberation effected through carnival as temporary (Bakhtin 1984: 10)—when carnival ends, official norms are re-entrenched. In fact, official systems of power in the Middle Ages *sanctioned* carnival, seeing

[8] See their interview with Steve Lambert of *Bomb Magazine*.

it as a tool by which to relieve revolutionary energies in a space and time in which these would dissipate harmlessly. While the Yes Men certainly do not operate in the Middle Ages, this idea of a sanctioned form of humour raises some interesting questions in relation to their appearance on the BBC: even if we agree that the moment was informational, and I will come to the question of whether or not this is indeed so, but even if we agree that is was a teaching moment, what does it mean that this moment took place in a mediascape that is already dominated by humour, and particularly the kind of fake-news humour popularized by Jon Stewart, Steven Colbert, Bill Maher or *The Onion*? In what way does an environment that welcomes parody of all sorts and revels in the funny and ridiculous condition the message the Yes Men attempt to put forward with their impersonation of Dow Chemical?

In fact, the milieu that popularizes (and thus makes legible) the mode in which they operate troubles the Yes Men themselves. They acknowledge the difficulty of situating their work in relation to the faction of funny men who dominate the news-as-entertainment airwaves. In an interview with Steve Lambert of *Bomb Magazine*, Bonanno and Bichlbaum work to distance themselves from comedians like Sacha Baron Cohen, to whom they are often compared,[9] while at the same time acknowledging their mutual satiric and humorous impulses. While they are understandably reluctant to characterize their work as simply pranks or hoaxes, neither is able to come up with a better term to describe the work that they do, and, more importantly to distinguish their project from that of Baron Cohen. Eventually, they admit their use of humour, but go on to try to clarify:

> We're basically trying to change the world using creative techniques, trying to do something creative to make an impact in the media or in the world [...] a prank seems like something you do just for the hell of it [...] a hoax is all about fooling people and what we do isn't about fooling people—it's actually about informing them. (Lambert 2009: online)

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[9] In reviews of *The Yes Men Fix the World* (2009), *The Washington Post* said that it "out-Borats Sacha Baron Cohen," *The Observer* wrote that it is "funnier and more useful than Sacha Baron Cohen's Brüno," and *Netribution* called them "the thinking person's Sacha Baron Cohen" <http://theyesmenfixtheworld.com/story.htm>.

Jeremy Gilbert has noted that the task of informing a presumably uninformed public is a sometimes questionable and yet central aim activist politics sets for itself (Gilbert 2008: 206), and yet, as the interviewer notes, the Yes Men *do* fool people; their work is largely based on fooling people. In fact, the Yes Men's Bhopal response would not have been possible without fooling people: first the researchers who searched their site, then the BBC producers who invited them to speak, and finally the TV viewing audience who watched an unprecedented corporate apology unfold on the news.

To fool or not to fool? These seemingly opposing gestures can perhaps be brought together in Žižek's understanding of the comic, which he says works as a "gesture of unveiling" but one that unveils the ridiculous, or utterly null (Žižek 2007: 219). The mask assumed by the Yes Men, the parodied face of Dow Chemical, is only superficially congruent with the corporate image. The gesture is used in order to unmask the typically blank corporate face through an unlikely discourse of humanity, humility and apology. The Yes Men offer a mask to the news-watching audience—they fool them with the false face of Dow Chemical miming an apology. While the mask initially fools people, the subsequent unveiling—which was part of the whole project, for the Yes Men would have known that their apology would be unmasked as false—reveals that behind the false face of Jude Finisterra is only the unapologetic face of Dow Chemical. It is surely this moment which the Yes Men posit as the informational or pedagogic moment—the moment at which the BBC audience is confronted with the so-called truth. And, in fact, before this "prank," Dow Chemical had not offered an apology, had not officially responded to criticisms that their efforts in rehabilitating Bhopal were insultingly minor. So, in one sense, then, the Yes Men's joke did succeed in provoking a public statement from Dow Chemical, which was forced to declare that in fact it was not offering an apology, nor was it preparing to make any kind of retribution payments to Bhopal. The Yes Men, then, fool in order not to fool. They fool in an effort to inform.

However, Žižek's description of the comic goes beyond this moment of unmasking, or, rather, his gesture of exposure is more complicated than simply provoking an "a-ha" moment in the audience. The ultimate comic effect for Žižek is to remove a mask only to confront the same face behind it—think, for instance, of Richard Nixon wearing a Richard

Nixon mask (Žižek 2007: 219). While this gesture can be read as pedagogical: the removal of a false corporate mask only to reveal the corporate face as false, at the same time, the removal of a corporate mask perceived to be real could also unveil merely another kind of corporate face. Though I am not suggesting that the Yes Men are part of the corporate or mainstream media structure, their oppositional stance is not automatically read into Jude Finisterra's news-spokesman visage. In fact, the family resemblance between Jude Finisterra and Borat—a less intentionally oppositional or activist-oriented character—is close. Moreover, the more overtly satirical news-reporters that populate the *Daily Show* or the *Colbert Report* construct a crowd of would-be Jude Finisterras that obscures the act of informing in a barrage of funny-but-serious/serious-but-funny news reporting.

In order to remain optimistic about the pedagogical implications of this news media landscape, one way of reading this situation would be to view all such humour as resistant. This is precisely the stance taken by Jeffery Jones in his book *Entertaining Politics* (2005), which looks at the rise of politics as entertainment in the '90s. Jones describes the hosts of late-night political entertainment programs as "wise fools" who can safely advance "devastatingly honest [...] critiques of power" (Jones 2005: 93). The question, however, that Jones leaves unaddressed is the framework in which these "critiques of power" are received: the mass media. When, if ever, does mainstream humour become oppositional? Jones leaves unanswered the question of how these comedians leverage mainstream media networks to launch a critique of the structures of power that underlie those same networks. Recognizing this sticky spot, in his paper on the rhetorical function of comedy in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Aloys Fleischmann offers a dual reading of laughter. On the one hand, he assigns a cynical laughter, or a powerful laughing-at that works to reinforce dominant ideologies, to the "governing elites"—it is senators and George W. Bush who laugh cynically about their position of power while "abdicating responsibility to the 'disenfranchised'" (Fleischmann 2007: 83). On the other hand, Fleischmann concludes optimistically by suggesting that Moore leverages this cynical laughter's antithesis. The laughter of the audience at the incongruity of the leaders depicted by Moore is "'a people's laughter' that is driven by the seriousness of the issues presented" (Fleischmann 2007: 84). This laughter, according to Fleischmann, refuses to disengage from the critique it puts forward (Fleischmann 2007: 84).

Indeed, Jones and Fleischmann are not alone in wanting to read Jon Stewart or Michael Moore as politically effective in their capacity to use humour to demonstrate the idiocy of those who lead the state. Our inclination is to want to read this mode as somehow revolutionary, even if its punch line is fleeting. Fleischmann concludes his paper with a discussion of the laughter of Moore's audience saying that their "laughter is an act that, in the very process of differentiating *us* from *them* must, if *even only superficially*, perform a refusal to disengage" (Fleischmann 2007: 84, last are my italics). Though he wants to conclude with a moment of critique and locate a kernel of resistance even within the fleeting moment of humour, Fleischmann founders here on at least one crux in this problem—superficiality. The humour leveraged by Moore or Stewart only superficially performs a refusal to disengage. In other words, we return to the problem Bakhtin witnessed in carnival, the problem that the moment of humorous subversion is transitory and occurs within, rather than outside, dominant structures of power. While Bakhtin concluded that this brevity marked the limits of any carnivalesque subversion, admitting that dominant structures of power were re-entrenched post-carnival, critics like Jones and Fleishmann are less willing to sacrifice this brief moment of revolutionary energy to dominant structures of power.

In fact, Jones posits humour as an "important tool of political critique" in a political climate that is increasingly characterized by absurdity (Jones 2005: 12). I would argue that, although a political climate that appears increasingly absurd seems to call for trenchant critique, in fact, absurdity makes the question and possibility of critique more complicated. It is in part the fact that a critic like Jones can lucidly describe the political situation in late capitalism as "absurd" that indicates some of the stakes in this bind around politics, resistance and humour. Useful in illuminating this seeming quandary is Žižek's description of the so-called postideological society (Žižek 1989: 28). In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), Žižek writes, "in contemporary societies, democratic or totalitarian, [...] cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game. The ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally" (Žižek 1989: 28). In this description, Žižek counters Eco's belief that laughter is a liberating, anti-totalitarian force, which, as I have argued, is repeated in criticisms like Jones' or Fleishmann's that seek to distinguish a subversive laughter stemming from mass culture. In Žižek's configuration, on the other hand, there is no either/or, no people's laughter vs. the laughter of the ruling elites—we are all in on the joke, or perhaps the joke is on all of us. Citing Marx's famous definition of ideology—"they do not know it, but they are doing it"—Žižek argues that the usual conception of ideology implies a "basic, constitutive naiveté" (Žižek 1989: 28), or a false consciousness based on our distorted representation of some other so-called social reality.[10] Instead of this notion of ideology, Žižek suggests, following Peter Sloterdijk's central argument in *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1987), that in late capitalism, ideology's dominant mode is cynical, rather than naïve. In a society characterized by a cynical ideology, "the cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less insists upon the mask" (Žižek 1989: 29). Žižek thus introduces the paradox of an enlightened false consciousness, or, to rephrase Marx, an ideology in which "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it" (Žižek 1989: 29). Vital to our discussion here, Žižek notes that "cynicism is the answer of the ruling culture to […] subversion" (Žižek 1989: 29). In other words, the critique of ideology is built into it—ideology is not meant to be taken seriously. Instead, its rule in society is not secured "by its truth value but by simple extra-ideological violence and promise of gain" (Žižek 1989: 30).

Returning to the Yes Men's joke on the BBC, we can see Žižek's subtle analysis of ideology play out. While their intervention on the BBC certainly provoked Dow Chemical to offer a public statement saying that they were not, in fact, liquidating any of their subsidiaries to reimburse the community of Bhopal, nor even offering an apology, the coverage of the so-called "hoax" in the media, once it was revealed as such, largely centered around a critique not of Dow Chemical but of the Yes Men. Once it was revealed that the Yes Men were behind the announcement,

[10] Of course, this is not to say that critics after Marx and before Žižek simply proffered a theory reliant on "unmasking" ideology to show it for what it is. The Frankfurt school, for instance, offered a sophisticated analysis of the ways in which this misrecognition is built into ideology itself.

media outlets responded furiously, denouncing them as callous comedians who had given the people of Bhopal false hope in order to merely make a joke. For example, some of the headlines reporting on the incident included: “Bhopal hoax inflicts widespread damage,”[11] “Bhopal anguish as BBC hoaxed,”[12] “Cruel $12B hoax on Bhopal victims and BBC.”[13] In this media response, questions of truth are sidelined and the issue of responsibility is deflected away from Dow Chemical and towards the Yes Men. In other words, the result of the intervention was not an unveiling of the hollowness of a neoliberal system that counts fiscal costs to corporate shareholders as more valuable than human costs to the disenfranchised citizens of a medium-sized Indian city, but rather raised questions over the propriety of joking about, even if those jokes are made on behalf of, those who are already the butt of a much crueller corporate scheme. The notion that there are human costs to the increasing profitability of the American economy is a non-starter; it is not a surprise. In *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdjik writes that “an essential aspect of power is that it only likes to laugh at its own jokes” (Sloterdijk 1987: 103); witness, then, the media machine reconfiguring the Yes Men into its own joke, twisting their punch line back on themselves and positing them as the butt of their own joke.

In an era of enlightened false consciousness, Žižek notes, in keeping with his critique of prevalent notions of ideology, it is not enough to critique blind spots in dominant ideologies (Žižek 1989: 30). We know these blind spots to exist, and yet we insist on the mask that allows us to act as though we did not. Similarly, though in a less theoretically dense and more overtly politically-oriented argument, in his book *Anticapitalism and Culture* (2008), Jeremy Gilbert notes that the anticapitalist project can never be simply one of unmasking. Without trying to downplay the importance of informing the public on the ills perpetrated by global mega-corporations like Union Carbide, Gilbert

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[11] Nicholas, Kate. 2004. “Bhopal Hoax inflicts widespread damage.” *PRWeek* (December 9): 20.

[12] Gedye, Robin. 2004. “Bhopal anguish as BBC hoaxed.” *The London Telegraph* (December 4): 1.

[13] O’Neill, Sean. 2004. “Cruel $12B Hoax on Bhopal victims and BBC.” *The Times (London)* (December 5): 3.

outlines a dominant mode among those who resist neoliberalism that amounts to what he terms a "politics of disclosure" (Gilbert 2008: 206). In other words, anticapitalist politics, he suggests, often builds its political projects around the end goal of "informing an uniformed public about the evils of capitalism" (Gilbert 2008: 206). The problem with this aim, according to Gilbert and implied by Žižek's analysis of the subtleties of ideology, is that people *already know* about the evils of capitalism. In relation to the Yes Men, or Jon Stewart or Steven Colbert, it is not enough to say that they point out the incongruity of elected leaders and neoliberal executives; it is not enough to laugh at the system. In fact, we laugh at the system *because* we recognize the incongruity. If we did not know these jokes to reflect an already entrenched discrepancy, we would not find them funny.

Žižek's analysis of ideology concludes that ideology is no longer fundamentally located in knowledge—since we no longer take truth claims seriously—but this does not mean ideology is a void category. Rather, Žižek locates ideology at the level of doing, or action—we do not take ideology seriously, and yet we still *act* as though we did. In relation to the Yes Men's intervention, then, this understanding of ideology encompasses the odd fact that viewers can recognize the joke, but are also willing to deflect the punch line away from Dow Chemical, the butt of the joke, and towards the jokers—the BBC's viewers very likely continued to live their lives as they had always done, perhaps irradiating their lawns with Dow chemicals and buying products produced by the underpaid people who today live in Bhopal. To say this differently, the TV audience recognizes the joke, but act as though they did not and in their criticism of the Yes Men's effort, implicitly support the same neoliberal system that they just as eagerly laugh at.

At the same time, to conclude this essay solely within the downward spiral of a cynical ideology would be to concede victory to a monolithic conception of the culture industry and a view of humanity as a horde of zombies. Indeed, the Yes Men's effort cannot be considered moot at the point of unmasking, nor is this the end of their work. It is precisely at Žižek's level of doing that the Yes Men offer something that Jon Stewart, Steven Colbert, Bill Maher and Michael Moore do not. The difference lies in their punch line. While Moore's films posit American leaders as contradictory and incongruous buffoons as we laugh, the Yes Men offer a different kind of punch line. While the butt of their joke is equally corporate America, they take aim at this target by showing how something else could be done. The joke they pull at Dow Chemical's expense does not end only with a revelation-to-the-informed centred on the incongruity of corporate profit in a world of suffering, but it also demonstrates the ease with which apologies and rehabilitation can begin. The Yes Men outline a very clear, if effectively unrealistic, plan of action in order to initiate retribution: the liquidation of a subsidiary company in order to fund a recovery plan in Bhopal. Finally, the Yes Men's joke clearly illustrates the barrier to these kinds of compassionate responses to corporate misdeeds: the fiscal cost and the financial loss to shareholders.

The Yes Men's joke concludes not just with a punch line, but with an alternative. Importantly, this alternative, though rhetorical, is posited at the level of action. In this way, the Yes Men offer an eruption of what Sloterdijk might term kynical subversion in a cultural moment characterized by a prevailing cynical ideology. Though Žižek borrowed Sloterdijk's description of contemporary ideology as cynical, he did not import the other half of the duo, except to invoke it as a cadaver. Kynicism is the natal stream of modern cynicism, though it is essentially its polar opposite. Sloterdijk describes kynicism as a sort of plebeian "cheekiness," a kind of "productive aggressivity, letting fly at the enemy: 'brave, bold, lively, plucky, untamed, ardent'" (Sloterdijk 1987: 103). Under the parameters of enlightened false consciousness, Sloterdijk fears for kynicism's cheeky resistance. Though, where Žižek considers kynicism a lost vestige of a former life, Sloterdijk insists on the persistence of a kynical current in late-capitalism. In fact, writing with an eye cast backwards towards the German tragedies of the Weimar Republic and World Wars, Sloterdijk insists that kynicism remains "the life philosophy of crisis," or the mode in which liveliness can persist even in times of extreme uncertainty and precarity (Sloterdijk 1987: 124).

I want to draw attention to the link that Sloterdijk draws between kynicism and embodiment. Essentially, kynical subversion takes place at the level of the material.[14] Here, the notion of kynicism offers a second

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[14] See Sloterdijk's delightfully named section "Pissing Against the Idealist Wind," (1987) *Critique of Cynical Reason*: 103-107.

interesting lens by which to understand the Yes Men's humour. In order to construct their spirited send-up of the hollow-men of corporate America, the Yes Men use their own bodies to enact a humorous resistance to neoliberalism. If cynical reason is characterized by an acquiescence to domination—or to put it more cautiously, "as participation in a collective, realistically attuned way of seeing things" (Sloterdijk 1987: 5)—kynical reason is the revolt of "self assertion and self-realization" (Huyssen 1987: xvii). In their joke, the Yes Men literally perform another way of being, another way of living as resistant and cheeky, within a system in which conformity is the easier (and often more applauded) choice. Ultimately, the Yes Men confront a bleak situation too common under neoliberal economic models: further loss to the disenfranchised, further profit to the enfranchised, and difficulty in corralling the energy and will to address the situation, and in response dress up, take on ridiculously punning pseudonyms and perform an alternative punch line, provoking maybe a laugh, perhaps a smile, or, at the very least, a glimmer of recognition not only of the problem, but of the level on which action occurs, in which the body can speak against cynical ideology. Sloterdijk writes that those "who still want to claim to be enlighteners must be able to be so cheeky, so impudent" (Sloterdijk 1987: 127). Whether or not they change the world, the Yes Men cannot be faulted for lacking cheek or impudence in the face of what often seem to be intractable and monolithic economic, media and social structures. Their humour draws attention to the level of doing—the level on which both action *and* inaction occur as deliberate and embodied choices.

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Remaking Feminism: Or Why Is Postfeminism So Boring?

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This article poses questions which have exercised me over the past few years, partly because of my work with chick lit and other popular fiction, partly as a result of my experience of viewing and teaching chick flick film adaptations, and also because of my interests in the development of Second Wave feminist thought.[1] The motivation to actually try to make sense of and connect these ideas came about in response to watching the recent remake of *The Women* (2008). This film might be viewed as an adaptation of both Cukor's classic 1939 film and Clare Boothe's 1936 play, which itself experienced a Broadway revival in 2002, starring *Sex and the City's* Cynthia Nixon. The proximity of this film's appearance to the release of the film adaptation of *Sex and the City* (2008), invited comparisons between the two which yielded much common ground; in addition to these I will also reflect upon the remake of *The Stepford Wives* (Frank Oz, 2004; also a novel by Ira Levin, 1972) which again utilises a successful text from a previous era to arguably postfeminist ends.

In recent years a number of commentators[2] have revisited the scope and meanings of post-feminism as well as examining its successful deployment in mass cultural texts. The three films mentioned above are being used here as representative examples of the deployment of discourses of postfeminism in popular forms and suggest that a new generation of chick flicks are capitalising on a significant proportion of

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[1] See *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (2000) and *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (2005).

[2] See for example Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (eds), *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2007); Roberta Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks: The Return of the Women's Film* (2007); Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009).

mature female cinema-goers, witnessed by the themes and characters developed which extend the boy-meets-girl theme of traditional romance, and tackle issues of gender politics in the workplace, mothering, sexual choices and the importance of female friendship. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker's *Interrogating Postfeminism* (2007) and Negra's later book, *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009), are examples of texts which have offered thorough and cogent analyses of the meanings and uses of postfeminism in popular culture, so I will restrict myself to a brief overview of the key features of postfeminist discourse in subsequent paragraphs, the better to frame my discussion of the films in question.

Generally, postfeminist discourse is characterised as deploying what might be regarded as broadly "feminist" sentiments in order to justify certain behaviours or choices, but these sentiments have become severed from their political or philosophical origins. Postfeminism in popular culture displays a certain schizophrenia in the way women are often portrayed as enormously successful at work and simultaneously hopelessly anxious about their intimate relationships, over which they often have little control or for which they seek continuous self-improvement. The world of work is generally portrayed as allowing female success, but there are glimpses of sexism which present enough problems that women have to solve for themselves or in consultation with their close girlfriends; beauty, fashion and adornment remain highly prized as part of the arsenal of the high-achieving woman, so that postfeminism equates with excessive consumption, while at the same time expressing sentiments of empowerment and female capability. The things that make women miserable are often covertly laid at the door of feminism and can be summarised thus: "feminism gave women social equality, choices and freedoms, but those choices have emotional costs which individual women are constantly trying to resolve and balance." It is feminism, then, that is positioned as creating the most significant challenges for postmodern women, even though all that feminism did was to foreground the reality that the traditional feminine sphere of the home remains painfully exclusive from the world of work and almost entirely the domain of women.

Popular cultural texts, whether fictional, televisual or filmic, replay these contradictions continually and in the repetition some interesting patterns emerge. I shall further explore this through the above textual examples and in the light of recent theoretical accounts of postfeminism, in order to suggest ways in which we might rethink the relationship between postfeminism and feminism and question the meanings that postfeminist discourse can now have.

There are a large number of recent films that might be dubbed postfeminist chick flicks; the three I have chosen are all "remaking" and adapting texts which have previously been successful, although the remakes have had varying degrees of success, with *The Women* disappearing from view almost immediately after cinematic release. In transforming their textual "origins" (whether that be novel, play, TV series or film) each adaptation presents some unresolved tensions in the representation of adult women in popular culture. In different ways each of these films at once ventriloquises feminist issues and values whilst shying away from endorsing feminism or any kind of oppositional ideology; in their focus on the body, ageing, motherhood, consumerism as self definition and female professional success the discourse of postfeminism presented offers nostalgic reimaginings of the past which evade feminist historicisation. For *Sex and the City*, there is also audience-induced nostalgia for the television series (aired from 1998-2004);[3] in *The Women* the nostalgic focus is on domestic retreat and the dream of finding a job compatible with motherhood (self-employment is the key, apparently). In *The Stepford Wives* domesticity figures as a dystopian threat to contemporary women's freedom, corrected by a new understanding between seeming "equal" partners, but at some cost to Joanna Eberhart's stellar media career as a cutting edge television producer of reality TV shows.

I shall pause briefly to re-explore the term "postfeminism" and to foreground the dominant meanings which will be attached to it throughout this essay. The term was first coined as far back as the 1980s[4] but since the 1990s its discursive connotations have been analysed

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[3] And this nostalgia is spreading backwards in time as the women in *Sex and the City 2* (2010) feature in cameo flashback as their younger 1980s selves; additionally Candace Bushnell published *The Carrie Diaries* in April 2010, a month before the film sequel's premiere.

[4] Susan Bolotin, "Voices from the Postfeminist Generation", *New York Times*, 17 October 1982.

critically by feminists; earlier, more positive accounts of the meanings of postfeminism have waned as more and more critics identify the seductions of the term as comforting us with the assurance that feminism's work is over. Postfeminism depends upon notions of feminism and feminist politics for its existence, but it often resorts to parody to diminish the historical importance of Second Wave feminism. It seems that postfeminist discourse is most successful when found in popular culture where it has become adept at absorbing criticisms and contradictions and at presenting itself as a way of communicating authentically about what is really important to today's woman; in this way a specifically female audience feels that it is the main addressee and in recent times this has extended to a growing mature audience with the money and time to consume films and buy boxed set DVDs of their favourite serial shows.[5] A postfeminist mode of address has become ubiquitous in popular forms which target women, and it is at its most successful and compelling in the portrayal of the problems confronting strong independent powerful women who have families and functional relationships; at one and the same time this discourse of postfeminism offers positive, reassuring messages to women while inscribing increasingly narrow definitions of femininity around body consciousness and age (see Gill 2007). As Sadie Wearing observes, "redefining age in these discourses seems to rely exclusively on the 'girling' of older women; attributing glamour to older bodies is linked to rejuvenating them" (2007: 294): in *The Stepford Wives* obviously age is frozen and reversed in the construction of the female robot; but the women in the other two films are "girled" in the sense that their absorption into heterosexual monogamy through marriage or cohabitation is always being forestalled by relationship problems: time and again they are returned to their long-time friends, even though their relationships are posited as the absolute goal.

Because of the ubiquity of the postfeminist message in cultural productions, tackling postfeminism from a critical perspective can be

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[5] In fact Ashley York argues that "Hollywood now treats women's blockbusters as franchises rather than the standalone products of chick flicks past" to the point that they are required to move beyond a gendered audience (York 2010: 16).

nothing short of disheartening and sometimes frankly boring, as it becomes difficult not to level what seem to be the same kind of "old" feminist criticisms at any number of cultural products, even when these same products are selling themselves as diverse, empowering and in tune with real women's concerns and pleasures. The TV series of *Sex and the City* was one such programme that stood out for many amongst the homogeneous dross: its long running, open-ended format allowed the slow development of relationship, professional and financial problems which were fluid and ongoing, rather than fully resolved. On a seemingly more trivial note, its fetishisation of Carrie's love of shoes became an aspirational fetish—now apparent in chick lit and other postfeminist narratives—associated with hedonistic pleasures, specifically pleasing oneself. In fact, as Ariel Levy observes, "a feathery pair of mules became the linchpin of a glamorous, romantic evening in Central Park. It was as though without the shoes, everything else – the moonlight, the trees, the man – would dissolve into the night, leaving nothing but the bleak mundanity of regular life in its place" (2006: 172). In light of the commercial success of chick fiction, TV and films there is a commitment to seem to address the needs of women as *individuals*, to interpellate them as consumers for whom purchasing and self-improvement is a pleasure. In such programmes the emphasis on luxury obscures, however, the genuine tedium of the bulk of "consuming" women do—buying groceries and household necessaries—a task that has to be infinitely repeated.

Postfeminism can be boring and frustrating to analyse because its message requires little unpacking and lies prominently on the surface of these narratives. For many of us in the business of offering feminist critiques of popular culture in the twenty-first century, it can seem like we're simply tilting at windmills. This article touches on those sensations of boredom and ennui which trouble a feminist cultural critic attempting to make sense of the postfeminist distractions of popular culture. Yet I will also try to inject some new interest into this study by identifying how postfeminism becomes more and more an empty signifier, not simply because it has become overburdened with meanings over the past two decades, but also and more significantly because the majority of the audience it addresses when ventriloquising a form of "old" feminism simply don't recognise the feminist rhetoric that it is parasitic upon. Twenty years on young women have been brought up on and inured to postfeminist rhetoric; it has supplanted feminism and provides a contemporary audience with a feminist memory, mediated, rendered palatable and just critical enough to key into an apolitical sense of social dissatisfaction with heterosexual and gendered role scripts.

Sex and the City in many ways is a touchstone at the heart of this discussion, because its global success as TV franchise makes it familiar to the widest range of consumers and critics. *The Stepford Wives* may be more familiar as a term which has migrated into common parlance to describe a surrendered wife; or as a memory of the 70s horror film—and of course the remake was released in the same year as the TV series *Desperate Housewives* first aired, itself a confusing "homage" and resistance to *The Stepford Wives* of the 1970s. *The Women* is by most people's standards a failure; it neither channels the bitchy competitiveness and sassy humour of either the play or the George Cukor film version, nor does it do anything "feminist" with its all-women cast—all the more surprising since it is directed by Diane English, better known for her involvement with the acclaimed US TV series *Murphy Brown*, and it features actors such as Meg Ryan, Candice Bergen and Annette Benning, known for taking on strong female roles in the past. As "remakes" and refunctionings of various kinds these examples allow us to explore how postfeminism migrates across or disrupts texts which might have been read as "feminist" by many. This is true of Levin's 1972 novel *The Stepford Wives* and Forbes's 1975 film adaptation, both dystopic from the young wives Joanna and Bobbie's point of view; Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* is a view of New York as the city of commitment-phobes where no successful career woman has a happy ending: women's lives have changed dramatically in professional terms with no consequent attitudinal shift in the men they date. Clare Boothe's play and Cukor's film of *The Women* portrayed the world of women with no men present at all, dramatising the spaces of the domestic and of naked consumerism and self-improvement. Diane English's remake continues this strategy (right until the end); again domestic and consumer spaces are populated entirely by rich women, but the film's opening also suggests, improbably, that women have gained dominance in the public sphere in an opening shot of a street populated entirely by women (represented by their feet).[6] While this film is the only one to begin in such a potentially utopian fashion, interestingly all these films sideline or exclude men, even when men's needs and the old-fashioned notion of the "male gaze" seems to be situated at their very heart, and this is a point to which I shall return later.

As I previously mentioned, the postfeminism utilised in these texts involves "the simultaneous incorporation, revision, and depoliticisation of many of the central goals of second-wave feminism" (Stacey quoted in Dow 1996: 87). In order to achieve this effect postfeminism:

- Has an intertextual relationship to feminism
- Speaks "through" popular culture and is often nostalgic
- Is anchored in "lifestyle"—consumption and commodification
- Deploys the rhetoric of choice and self-fashioning
- Displays anxiety about ageing and physical decline, but also represents "real" age as always deferred by health and beauty regimes
- Pits pleasure against political engagement; postfeminist characters have clear views on gender, but use humour to deflect pain and seriousness

Feminism lurks on the periphery as a distant voice or nagging conscience in the background to women's lives as represented in these texts, whereas postfeminism is foregrounded in the way women ask themselves what seem to be "feminist" questions and as if by magic come up with the all-purpose postfeminist answer that they have a right to "choose", and proceed to make their life choices in alarmingly predictable ways untrammelled by gender politics and in ways that do not threaten to destabilise the status quo. The overall effect of this is that "feminist" sentiments are themselves cleansed and made over to offer complacent observations about largely well-off white women enjoying the fruits of advanced capitalism, finding the well-trodden path of heteropatriarchal romance and somehow making it their own. We see

[6] See http://www.dvdbeaver.com/film2/DVDReviews43/the%20women%20blu-ray/title.jpg

this to some extent in Carrie's transformation to "bride" in the film of *Sex and the City*; she will marry at the end, but will eschew the *Vogue* style event seemingly heralded by her earlier modelling assignment,[7] in favour of a more modest affair, dressed in a vintage label-less suit at the public Registry Office.

The postfeminist "script" coming into its own since the late 1980s, might be framed as an infinitely adaptable text. Attached to "women's films" it excises diversity whilst celebrating difference, and the more it "speaks for" the professional woman, the more it erodes or erases the workplace, or at least once again problematises women's place within it. Postfeminism, as has already been hinted, speaks in the contradictions that demonstrate most articulately the tensions remaining between the public and the private in the lives of women. In its maturing second or third decade, postfeminism continues to ventriloquize feminism but the effect isn't to raise the consciousness of the audience as much as to gain their complicity in this "knowledge" which is raised as social critique but for which there is no solution.

One of the controversial areas of feminist debate has for example been that of the fashion and beauty industry and the politics of women's clothing in their impact in reinforcing the ideal-type feminine.[8] Here the perspectives offered by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) are pitched against the self-help pro-female capitalism of Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) and later the pioneering style of *Cosmopolitan.* While Friedan dissected the soft-sell of magazine advertising and the drudgery of housework and observed the paradox that

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[7] Carrie accepts to model different designers' wedding dresses for a fashion spread in *Vogue*. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=059XfzfOq-s

[8] One recent writer, Linda M. Scott, avers that what she sees as the anti-beauty stance of feminists is anti-difference and elitist. In her book historical contextualising challenges what she sees as the homogenising stance of modern feminism; but it might be argued that she herself is conflating the individual pleasures of self-adornment with the *industrial* context of contemporary fashion discourse, moreover arguing that the industry has long been female dominated and therefore cannot be seen to oppress women: this suggests a superficial acquaintance with theories of patriarchy perhaps. See *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism* (2005).

since professions became open to women, "'career woman' has become a dirty word" (1982: 60), Gurley's book and her role as *Cosmo* editor posited a relationship between glamour and female career success. In *The Women* the glossy magazine editor Sylvie best represents the successful career woman who might be regarded as at the forefront of the new feminist vanguard. Talking about the fashion magazine industry she opines: "We tell women to feel good about themselves and then we print fifteen pieces on crazy diets. We run ads for wrinkle creams: the models are twenty years old! We're driving women mad." All anticipated responses have been effectively evacuated and we are left with the "display" of feminist "wisdoms" trotted out dutifully. We almost forget for a moment that Sylvie's job as a style editor is to replicate women's fashion desires every month; we're drawn to her anxiety about finding a "new" trend or losing her job to a younger more savvy editor.

Similarly in the first *Sex and the City* film, the image of Miranda and Carrie in their witches' hats[9] is compelling and gestures toward their palpable ageing since the TV series opened in 1998, and therefore their possible descent into "cronehood" and feminine invisibility. Miranda, shopping with Carrie for Halloween outfits observes, "the only two choices for women: witch and sexy kitten" to which Carrie responds, "you just said a mouthful there, sister!"[10] as if acknowledging decades of feminist research into the virgin/whore dichotomy in Western culture. Feminists can utilise these embedded "feminist" critiques in our analyses of these films, but let's not be duped into thinking we have discovered layered or embedded meanings; these are very much on the surface of the film, flagged up only to be swept aside.

The "messages" offered in the three films are playfully complex in their potential contradictions, negotiating as they do the maze of signifiers of empowered women being utilised in popular forms. Even though, as mentioned earlier, the messages are not hard to interpret, the rhetoric of feminism is trotted out dutifully, as a lesson already learned.

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[9] In the scene, only Miranda is wearing a witch's hat, but Carrie's high fashion headpiece signifies either witchcraft or pilgrim fathers.

[10] This exchange between Miranda and Carrie (minus the witch's hat which Miranda puts on later in the same scene) is actually included in the film trailer. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4jVEyGuTfY

The films therefore negotiate two imagined territories: that of the liberal feminist commonsensical view (acceptance that women earn less than men, still take responsibility for domestic maintenance, are chief child carers, are more affected by ageing and contemporary body fascism than men, etc.) pitted against the "guilty pleasures" associated with postfeminism, where one is given "permission" to enjoy femininity and what are regarded as its trappings—encouraged to accept reluctantly that success is in direct opposition to emotional and domestic contentment. All postfeminist chick flicks deploy the trope of the powerful woman, yet focus on women's issues and lives by a concern with female friendship, female sexuality and location of the drama in the spaces of consumption and leisure as well as (more occasionally) the workplace. Given the focus on serial singleness and fear of ageing, even the nourishing female friendships which so often feature cannot disguise the sense that these women's lives begin to look rather bleaker and more culturally determined than the discourse of postfeminism would at first indicate.

Ultimately, Carrie's marriage to Big in *Sex and the City* and the birth of a much-desired male child to Edith (Debra Messing) at the end of *The Women* is a forced "happy resolution" which actually disrupts the postfeminist rhythms of each text, by the presence of the returning male, who has been discursively almost redundant until this point. *The Women* offers us a tableau of the happy alternative family of three friends gathered round Edith and her new-born baby boy in the absence of the father[11] (recalling, intriguingly, the all-female family tableau in all three film adaptations of *Little Women*). The film stays true to Cukor's version by leaving the penitent and returning husband offstage, but the male child acts as his proxy, a reminder that in postfeminist discourse male/female relationships are at its heart. In *Sex and the City*, however, Big, having eventually married Carrie privately, returns her to her three best friends waiting on the other side of the Registry Office door in a curious reversal of the marriage ceremony when the bride is "given away". This tacit acknowledgement of the crucial practical and emotional support supplied by Carrie's female friends further

[11] See http://www.agonyboothmedia.com/images/articles/The_Women_2008/The_Women_2008_016.jpg

problematises the putative role of the partner in heterosexual relationships: after all, many of her most romantic moments have been shared with the other women rather than with Big.

The remade *Stepford Wives*, on the other hand, changes what was in the first film a literal performance of patriarchy to a symbolic and ironic one. The evil genius behind the robot wives is Claire Wellington and not her husband Mike, whom she has reconstructed as a robot after she learns of his affair and kills him. Claire's confessional testimony at the film's end is that of the career woman who latterly sees the error of her ways; and in effect a presumed retrosexist patriarchal plot is revealed to be a postfeminist one. The humour is placed here as a relief valve; ultimately there is nothing funny about women as domestic robots in a postfeminist world, and the original plot is taken to Byzantine contradictory extremes to deflect any trace of the original location in horror; but what remains is sometimes both disturbing and offensive. In a scene at the Men's Association the servile female, summoned by her husband's remote control, is quite literally transformed into a cash machine, which somehow tames the "money shot" of hardcore porn but recalls the doublespeak of some of its producers. The absurdity of the scene attempts to deflect offence, but it is hard not to recall the June 1978 cover of *Hustler* which displayed Larry Flynt's declaration on its front cover that "we will no longer hang women up like pieces of meat", positioned next to an image of a woman being passed through a meat grinder with only her legs remaining.

As Tasker and Negra remind us in their recent work: "Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalise aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of women as empowered consumer […] postfeminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self" (2007: 2). This doesn't mean that class and race don't make their appearance, but in empowering working-class women and women of colour key problems arise in these texts. Louise (Jennifer Hudson) in *Sex and the City* becomes Carrie's personal assistant after Big jilts her. As the purveyor of home spun wisdoms Louise's character works hard and represents small town cohesion, real romance, tempered by her shared enthusiasm with Carrie for handbags and shoes. As the potential fifth friend who might add diversity to the group, Louise nonetheless retains a racially determined role, so visible in women's films of the 1940s, of the domestic helper.[12] Crystal, the mistress in *The Women* retains the traces of Cukor's version (where she is played by Joan Crawford) intact in that, having lost the battle for Stephen at the end, she returns to the perfume counter where she worked as the "spritzer girl", her bid to marry above her station having failed. In remaking female destiny for the twenty-first century, these films still reassert racial and class determinism.

Significantly, however, most of the impetus of postfeminism's attraction to the female spectator is that of "choice". In the will to individualise the women depicted in these films, more "truths" have to be told about female emotional responses and sexuality. For the editors of *Reading Sex and the City*, "women talking about sex, creating humour and sharing laughter are changing the script" (Akass and McCabe 2004: 13), but the scene in *Sex and the City* in which Samantha covers her naked body with sushi (which she has, implausibly, made herself) to surprise a lover who fails to arrive, is resonant of earlier romance films where the woman waits at the end of a telephone for the man who belatedly returns her calls. As Katha Pollitt notes however, "women have learned to describe everything they do, no matter how apparently conformist, submissive, self-destructive or humiliating, as a personal choice that cannot be criticized because personal choice is what feminism is all about" (2004: 13). In the case of *Sex and the City* the beautifully composed image of Samantha is disrupted as, bored, she gets up and the sushi splats to the floor to be eaten by her dog. Samantha does "change the script" in the sense that she leaves her long-term lover, Smith (this scene having taught her that monogamy has made her inauthentic in some way) and returns to promiscuous singledom; yet the emphasis on her age at the end of this film (and sent up to absurd proportions in the 2010 sequel) suggests the script interpellates her in ways that are never fully explored.

Epiphanies or makeovers are a central feature of chick flicks, and Samantha's return to her old self offers a certain audience satisfaction in that the four key women of *Sex and the City* perform different

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[12] For an interesting discussion of postfeminism and African American women see Kimberly Springer, "Divas, Evil Black Bitches, and Bitter Black Women" (2007: 249-276).

dimensions of postfeminist femininity, thereby suggesting its conflicting selves can never be resolved in the form of one woman. Certainly this multiplication of the feminine through the multi-voiced text is becoming a staple of chick lit. In *Sex and the City* Carrie Bradshaw is something of a choric figure; her inclinations are to be Charlotte, Miranda and Samantha simultaneously—to fuse the domestic feminine, the oxymoronic career woman, and the sexually self-defined woman—and the futility of this desire is continually exposed by her separation, her need to ask questions (via her column) which are never satisfactorily answered.

For her part, Joanna Eberhart in *The Stepford Wives* is recast from the aspiring part-time photographer of the original novel and film to the cold-blooded media professional whose reality TV shows play women off against men and where it is women who seek liberation through sexual determination. Having been shot at by an angry wronged husband, who alarmingly tells a female audience he is going to "kill all the women",[13] Joanna is sacked and her mental decline and exhaustion anticipates the story of Claire Wellington in the finale of *Stepford Wives* who refashions her world when she discovers that her life as a successful professional woman has been a sham because her marriage falls apart in the most predictable of ways (she finds her husband in the arms of another woman). Her creation of an ideal husband is ironically (but not surprisingly in the logic of postfeminism) that of the perfect patriarch to whom she gladly seems to defer: the fact that Joanna "kills" him (she hits him and his head comes off revealing he is a robot) suggests that patriarchy is more easy to unseat from a postfeminist world view.

Self-fashioning also figures as another central postfeminist project in these film adaptations. In the remake of *The Women* Mary's self definition is the key to her happiness and the resumption of her relationship with husband Stephen comes second to the establishing of her own fashion label and season collection. This offers an entirely different turn of events from that of Cukor's film where Mary, realising her friends' advice has caused her divorce and made her utterly

[13] This phrase recalls real examples of femicide, such as the Montreal massacre on 6 December 1989.

miserable, chooses to fight to regain Stephen by using her "feminine" wiles against the working-class Crystal. In English's remake, as a result of her husband's affair with Crystal—and after her teenage daughter nearly goes off the rails—postfeminist Mary reconstructs herself through photos and magazine clippings, just as the jilted Carrie reviews her past (via her wardrobe and by means of a "fashion show" played out to her friends) and, briefly, professionalises her writerly identity through the employment of a personal assistant. The remake of *The Stepford Wives* retains the central drama of the forcible reconstruction of the personalities of the Stepford women through their bodies and household skills, but in having Joanna's husband Walter as the rescuer who deactivates the software in their brains that altered their behaviour in the first place, men in postfeminist discourse are the rescuers of twenty-first century women, guiding them through the feminist and patriarchal minefields onto the path of liberal, moderate re-engagement with men.

As we explore the language of postfeminism in these examples it becomes clearer that there is little by way of coherent definition; the term represents the absorption and consequent dilution of feminism by the substitution of political statements of intent for images of women playfully submitting their feminine selves to scrutiny. That postfeminism still relies on its power to represent women as autonomous and successful by "forgetting feminism" or eliding it can be taken as read and takes us no further than the space already demarcated and theorised by cultural commentators. In order to move on from this position we must take our analysis of such cultural products one step further and ask what "feminism" it is that is being summoned and who can recognize it?

Intriguingly postfeminism in popular culture has prompted a style of cultural criticism which suggests an embracing of the surfaces of postfeminism alongside reinterrogations of feminism and a celebration of consumption: as Akass and MacCabe suggest, the critics in their collection of essays "trace a path through contemporary cultural and critical debates, through ideas about popular and TV culture, and through our own responses to and pleasures in the *Sex and the City* text" (2004: 7). Other feminist cultural critics find themselves negotiating a space between the fannish temptation to participate in postfeminist cultural events versus the wish to continue to offer feminist political resistances to dominant heteropatriachal ideologies. For those who don't suffer the boredom of the tiresome role of reinventing the same feminist critique of numerous texts, there is the sense of being implicated and hailed by the pleasures of the text, just as Third Wave feminism claims to embrace heterogeneity, celebrating fashion, adornment and the consumption of mainstream popular culture, set against the development of a politicised and responsible self.

In adaptation of texts such as these feminism is always “othered”, which is not to say that some pure form of more desirable feminism inhabited the “original” texts in some unproblematic way (certainly not in the case of *The Women*), but that these postfeminist cultural productions are so adept at producing pleasures in the simultaneous recognition and erasure of feminism that they become arid and the opposite of their intention to be authentic—ersatz. The constant return to the theme that full empowerment and heterosexual romance are incompatible has meant that under mature postfeminism men increasingly are being put under erasure. In *Sex and the City* Big continues to inhabit the sidelines of the film (just as he did the TV series) because he is of minimal narrative interest except that he provokes the emotional crises which Carrie’s friends can nurture her through; and having finally married her he swiftly symbolically delivers her back to her female homosocial “home”.[14] Men in these films acquire a certain temporal stasis—Big is “himself”, never really able to grow up since their first meeting 10 years previously; in the film he learns to mimic the language of romance by copying the love letters of famous men;[15] Mike Wellington in *Stepford Wives* is arrested at the point of his infidelity and his retrosexist persona replays the nostalgia of the film’s credits which feature real advertisements of women demonstrating domestic kitchen products from the 1950s and 60s. Stephen in *The Women,* true to the previous versions, never makes his reappearance and remains in his visual absence the wayward virile husband. The women in all these films, heralding the darker undertow of postfeminist thinking are ageing and battling decline and deterioration—as Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra observe, “female adulthood is defined as a state of chronic

[14] As Gerhard notes, “This elective family structure is one that gay men and lesbians have relied on for generations – a self-selected family that willingly meets its members’ needs” (2005: 44).

[15] An invented book that was developed and published after the film’s release.

temporal crisis" (2007: 10). I have already mentioned how Samantha in *Sex and the City* represents the woman battling age by refusing to "be" her age, and in *The Women* Mary and Crystal represent ageing mother versus youthful sex siren (the "witch or sexy kitten" of Carrie and Miranda's exchange, mentioned earlier). *Stepford Wives* interestingly reverses this trajectory by having the women caught in their prime; made over as sterile, sexier versions of themselves.

It is ironic but surely not coincidental that as men physically disappear from the postfeminist romance, the emergence of the "bromance" features their side of the story. With the postfeminist narrative's focus on friendship and sharing of problems, the lack of male friendships in the chick flicks is addressed in films such as *I love you, Man* (2009) suggesting a separate spheres logic which even heterosexuality can't heal. The underlying message mature postfeminist popular cultural discourse powerfully sends is that the only answer to the problem of how to portray the contemporary heterosexual relationship is to decouple the couple and enact the relationship in homosocial spaces. However, as I've previously speculated in my work on chick lit, while men are more increasingly being put under erasure in classic women's texts, these texts themselves remain colonised by a "male" logic of heteropatriachy (2005: 211-12). It is as if postfeminism's schizophrenic logic at once situates men at the heart of the "problem" in women's lives, but cannot condemn them or represent them changing, for fear of offering an authentic (and therefore dangerous) feminist critique. So instead women constantly remake themselves anew, via the makeover trope, in opposition to the static image of the romance hero.

The postfeminist dynamic in popular culture has turned in on itself; its plots re-enact the rhetoric of choice, self-fashioning, perpetual youth and carefree humour once too often. The recently released second film of *Sex and the City* tries to carry a winning formula too far in an artificial plot twist which is necessary to evacuate the now married Big from the scene. Separatism, cast as the extreme and unattractive result of "strident" feminism, ironically taints these narratives of postfeminism; unable to politicise the relationship of women to men, they offer us, albeit temporarily, a dangerously liberating radical feminist solution—the promise of a world without men.

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More for the Fit: Gender and Class in the Representation of Designated Adoption in a Selection of U.S. Television Series

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In recent years, popular cultural representations of assisted reproduction, adoption and surrogacy have multiplied and become almost ubiquitous. As Heléna Ragoné already noted in 2000, "[s]tories of third-party reproduction are routinely found in the media nowadays, and it is fast becoming a familiar and even naturalized aspect of American culture" (2000: 72). Films like *Juno* (2007), *Baby Mama* (2008), *Misconceptions* (2008) or *The Back-up Plan* (2010), as well as television series such as *Friends*, *Sex and the City*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Curb your Enthusiasm*, *Spin City* or the short-lived NBC drama *Inconceivable*, have all dealt with these issues in different ways, reflecting a growing awareness of the problem of infertility—mainly as they concern middle-class women or couples and the varied solutions that are on offer to them.[1] The advantages of depicting these questions in the context of light entertainment allow producers and directors to address topical social problems in a way that appeals to a broad audience. While one might see more openness in dealing with issues previously considered taboo as a positive development, some problems nonetheless arise in the ways that these are portrayed. This proves particularly true of the comedic form. Indeed, when jokes relating to theses issues profuse—not least in a sitcom—one may be entitled to ask what or who is the butt of the jokes. In this context, I want to show how specific representations of class and gender relations are, in Ragoné's word, "naturalized", that is, made to appear natural and commonsensical, as part of the comic depiction of

[1] Not all plots involve heterosexual couples, some, such as *Spin City* and *Brothers and Sisters* involve gay men as the prospective adoptive parents.

designated adoption[2] in three popular television series—*Sex and the City*, *Friends* and *Desperate Housewives*.[3]

In looking at these popular representations of designated adoption, I take my cue from Rosalind Gill, who argues in *Gender and the Media* (2007) that "representations matter", and that the role of feminist analyses of the media consists in making clear the link between on the one hand "images and cultural constructions" and on the other "patterns of inequality, domination and oppression" (2007: 7). Thus, even though the three series I will discuss are all primarily aimed at entertaining, I believe that they are nevertheless revealing in more ways than one might expect about mainstream attitudes to both gender and class. Moreover, the extreme popularity of these shows, both in the U.S. and abroad, makes them a particularly relevant object of study in this respect.

Reproduction, class and ideology

From an intersectional feminist perspective, adoption is by no means an unproblematic issue, often highlighting inequalities of power between different categories of women, rather than promoting global sisterhood. As Laura Woliver for example points out in *The Political Geographies of Pregnancy* (2002): "It is no accident […] that the flow of adopted children is in one direction: from the less affluent to the more affluent groups within any society, from less affluent countries to the middle and upper classes in more affluent countries, and from minority groups to

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[2] Designated adoption is a specific form of adoption whereby prospective adoptive parents and pregnant birth mothers are paired together even before the child is born, usually through the services of an agency.

[3] The material I will focus on consists of three particular storylines: one in *Friends* (*F*), one in *Sex and the City* (*SAC*) and one in *Desperate Housewives* (*DH)*. The episodes in question were first broadcast in the U.S. during the period from January 8, 2004 to April 30, 2006. I am aware that the series in question constitute different television genres—*Friends* for example is a situational comedy, or sitcom, while *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives* have been characterized as a hybrid form called comedy-drama or dramedy. They do, however, share similar comic elements, not least in the way they deal with the adoption plot.

majority groups in the United States" (2002: 117). This one-way flow suggests that some women's misfortunes can be others' opportunities, with all that this entails in terms of a potential scope for exploitation.

The significance of my title—"More *for* the Fit"—deliberately echoes one of the 1920s slogans of the American Birth Control League, which was "More *from* the Fit, Less from the Unfit", in order to highlight the long-standing inequalities between women in the sphere of reproduction. This slogan reveals the darker side of the early movement for birth control in the United States which, besides advocating more reproductive freedom for some (privileged) women, also supported forms of racial hygiene whereby "the physically and mentally unfit" (Sanger 1919: 10) would be prevented from procreating, thus restricting other women's control over their own reproduction.[4] Although racist undertones were prevalent in this debate, class prejudices also featured highly.[5] My change of preposition from *from* to *for* points, however, to a shift in emphasis in the adoption debate away from the idea of genetic to that of social and material suitability—in other words a form of social rather than racial hygiene—something that I will argue is reflected in the series themselves. The key questions in this context are how the female characters at both ends of the adoption transaction are represented, how they are contrasted with respect to class and what ideological implications this has. Another important aspect I want to look at in this respect is the relation between the mother and her body which, in the context of light entertainment, often turns into an object of ridicule directed at the ignorance of working-class mothers about the functions of their body during pregnancy. Thus, although these television series are obviously meant only to touch upon the issue of adoption lightly and comically, they nevertheless reflect deeper underlying prejudices about both class and gender in present-day U.S. society. It is this ideological subtext that my article seeks to bring to the surface in a more critically informed way, interrogating that which might easily pass as seemingly innocent popular entertainment.

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[4] See Avril (2008) for a discussion of the uneasy relation between the advocacy for birth control and eugenics (170-175).
[5] See Kevles (2004).

There is of course a recurring debate about what class is and whether it still exists in our postmodern world of apparently unlimited social and economic migration. Class is an especially downplayed issue in the U.S., both in the general debate (Scott and Leonhart 2005) and within critical media studies, where the focus has rather been on representations of race and gender (Casey et al. 2002: 26). Class can be defined along different lines, such as property ownership, occupation, income, but also education, social status and lifestyle. Since the working-class characters in these adoption storylines are typically not well developed, what we learn about them we do primarily through verbal, visual and personality traits. In order to understand the way class figures as a significant unspoken part of the portrayal of adoption in these series, I will examine therefore the symbolic practices used to signify class differentials, such as clothes, taste, sexual habits or intellectual skills. In a medium like the sitcom (in the case of *Friends*), which needs to convey meaning about characters instantly to produce humor and laughter, even a choice of clothes fabric can become an effective signifier of class status. In "The Silenced Majority", originally published in 1989, Barbara Ehrenreich for example points, to the prevalent middle-class stereotyped association of polyester with the working class (2007: n.p.).

My aim in looking at representations of gender and class in popular media does not stem from a belief that television does or should act as a mirror of society. Nor am I interested in arguing that "real" social relations can unambiguously be identified, measured and then compared to corresponding cultural representations, where the latter might be found wanting. I do, however, subscribe to Stuart Hall's claim that "the media's main sphere of operation is the production and transformation of ideologies" (2003: 89) and as such deserves critical scrutiny in order to assess what kind of ideology specific media products either actively promote or unconsciously articulate. One can also define ideology in many ways. Stuart Hall's characterization in his article "The Whites of their Eyes" (1981) I find particularly elucidating, explaining it as "images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (2003: 89). Ideology here does not stand in opposition to reality, but actually forms our experience of it. In this sense, ideology should also be understood in the plural—ideologies—rather than as a singular, unified entity (2003: 90). It is, however, important to recognize that not all ideological frameworks carry the same weight. In relation to television for example, a privileged minority within media production possess the power to choose how both themselves and other groups are depicted—represented—for the entertainment of millions of others. As Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill have argued, "[t]elevision not only represents social groups; it also helps to construct and maintain the norms and values through which society is ordered" (2004: 368). This is where the relation between representation, ideology and power comes into play. The audience, while able to resist or contest the dominant ideology through the ways they themselves "interpret," "understand" or "make sense" of what they watch, nonetheless lack the same possibility to make their own ideologies or worldviews similarly commonsensical or hegemonic. I therefore see media representations of gender and class as performing a specific type of cultural and ideological work, which impacts significantly on the way we understand and relate to the world around us.

Behind the veil of popular entertainment, these series contribute, I would claim, to entrenching caricatures of class, which in the final analysis only serve to justify a hierarchical society in which working-class women (as well as men) should know their place. Moreover, by extension, it is the comic framework of these television series that makes the audience complicit in this ideological denigration of lower class people. The relation between signifying practices and power can be seen as part of the subtext of these television narratives. Moreover, certain signifying practices are connected to underlying ideological assertions, i.e. producing and reproducing power relations. Television is the ultimate mass medium, its capacity for naturalizing the power of patriarchal capitalism for popular consumption is, therefore, not to be underestimated.

I am fully aware, however, that a broader study of audience reception would not only burst the boundaries of my own research concerns; such extended considerations would also complicate my argument, since communication is hardly a one-way street with consumers of media texts gullibly absorbing the message exactly as the producers intended. Stuart Hall for example puts forward the concepts of coding and decoding which involve three audience positions involving dominant, negotiated as well as oppositional readings (1980: 136-138). Given the parameters of my own study, I would nevertheless see myself as representing an audience viewpoint that is more oppositional. I am therefore interested in interrogating this dominant discourse, or to cite Stuart Hall, in operating within an oppositional position that "detotaliz[es] the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference" (1980: 138). In other words, I see myself as deconstructing the ideological subtext embedded in these television comedies and decoding them within a marxist-feminist intersectional framework. To some, the terms detotalizing/totalizing may of course appear problematic, since they seem to suggest a consistency and stability within the function of ideology, a view that has been seriously undermined by contemporary critics. Nevertheless, I would still claim that Hall's concept remains useful in that it underscores the subversive possibilities of television criticism, of the political potential of the struggle over signification.

Outward signs of class

Before I move on to discuss the representation of adoption and birth mothers more specifically, let me first briefly introduce the main characters of the series directly concerned with the adoption plot. The three couples involved—Monica and Chandler in *Friends*, Charlotte and Harry in *Sex and the City* and Gabrielle and Carlos in *Desperate Housewives* are all obviously well-off, urban—or suburban in the latter case—heterosexual professionals. Monica and Charlotte are the most traditionally domestic of the female characters in each series, while Gabrielle's character most often stands out because of her hypersexual femininity and concurrent unbridled consumerism. Not surprisingly, Monica and Charlotte acutely desire and actively try to become mothers to complete their picture of domestic bliss, while Gabrielle is shown previously avoiding motherhood and maternity in order to hold on to her size zero model body. Moreover, prior to the adoption plot, Gabrielle has suffered a miscarriage about which she typically does not seem to grieve, potentially opening up for a different perspective on the issue.

In contrast to the presumptive adoptive parents, the biological parents[6] in all three series clearly come from a much humbler social background. This is signaled most notably by the clothes worn by the different characters. Dress style functions therefore as a way of immediately conveying meaning through the contrast of sophistication, taste and ultimately class background. These relatively banal signifiers become encoded in the fictional representations, since they refer to something beyond themselves. They conjure up stereotyped images about class, even though the concept of class itself remains otherwise unspoken.

In the final episode of *Sex and the City* for example, Charlotte goes shopping with a view to meeting the birth parents, announcing to the male friend accompanying her that she needs "something *simple* to wear" for the occasion (*SAC* 6.20, my emphasis)[7]—thus alerting the audience to the class-clash that will follow. However, when we do meet the parents, we realize that Charlotte has failed to dress down enough in order to match the couple's even plainer workaday look, the father donning a combination of denim jacket, denim shirt and denim pants for dinner—denim obviously accomplishing the same function as Ehrenreich's polyester— in contrast to both Charlotte's and Harry's casual but chic outfits. The generally dull blue/gray color of both parents' outfits, although marking them out, also paradoxically contributes to rendering them invisible, unworthy of attracting either the interest or curiosity of the audience about who they might be, making them no more than a foil to the main characters.

The clothes of Erica—the birth mother in *Friends* —also stand out for their lack of sophistication. Just like the father in *Sex and the City*, Erica wears an outdoor jacket inside in several scenes, signaling not only the fleeting temporariness of her presence in the series, but also the fact that she is clearly out of place in the urban home environment of the main characters. Hairstyles in all three series also serve to mark the different social backgrounds of the characters, with the biological

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[6] We meet the biological father in both *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives* but not in *Friends*.

[7] References to specific episodes will be according to the following model: abbreviated title followed by season and episode number.

mothers often having disheveled and/or dyed blond hair, in contrast to the much more elegant (and dyed) style of the main female protagonists.

In *Desperate Housewives*, the clothes of Libby, the birth mother, additionally indicate promiscuity, reflecting her job as a pole dancer who has to attract male night club clients. However, Gabrielle is not at first contrasted in any superior way to the birth mother. Indeed, another pole dancing friend of the mother at one point compliments Gabrielle on her look, which can either suggest that her style and elegance are noticeable or that her taste is on a par with that of the pole dancers' (*DH* 2.17). Thus, it is only money that differentiates the two women at this stage and not any implicit moral or stylistic superiority. Because of the series' satirical and cynical trademark tone of voice, the treatment of adoption in *Desperate Housewives* brings out the seedier aspects of the baby market and does not seek to idealize the prospective parents. Initially therefore, Gabrielle and Carlos are portrayed as both mercenary and unemotional, only interested in getting the best baby return for their money. The same is true of the Libby, who also reveals her calculating nature from the outset.

While issues of class are more clearly foregrounded in *Desperate Housewives* since the exchange of money for the baby constitutes one of the most important elements in the storyline, the same issues are instead submerged in *Sex and the City* and *Friends* into other social hierarchies, such as regional dichotomies or differences. Much is made for example of the contrast between the urban and rural backgrounds of the characters. This displacement from class to geographical positioning makes the humor much more acceptable, since the audience might be less likely to object to the making fun of the birth mother as a hillbilly rather than as underprivileged.

In *Friends*, we are told, before we even meet her, that the birth mother is from Ohio, a geographical location that appears in comic contrast to the hip, New York setting of Monica's and Chandler's lives. Her country origins are, for instance, made fun of in the episode "The one where Joey speaks French," in which Monica and Erica play a trick on Chandler by suggesting that the baby be given the same name as Erica's father "Jiminy Billy Bob", a typical hillbilly combination which clearly horrifies Chandler (*F* 10.13). Although Erica is the deliverer of the joke, significantly it is Monica who has suggested it, making Erica in fact unwittingly the butt of the joke. The question of course is whether it is the prejudiced response that gives rise to the collective laughter, or whether the audience is supposed to experience recognition and thus identification with the hillbilly stereotype.[8]

The same New York-centric prejudice is reproduced in *Sex and the City* (the shopping scene previously mentioned) in which the couple who is supposed to give their child to Charlotte and Harry, is found to be from North Carolina. This piece of biographical information spurs a rather cynical comment from Charlotte's male friend, who imagines a TV–dramatization of their adoption story as being about "a stylish socialite couple open[ing] up their Park Avenue home to dumb, toothless yokels" (*SAC* 6.20). Of course, as with the scene in *Friends* mentioned above, the humor is double-edged. Once again, what seems to be funny is the incongruous image, at the same time as the audience is probably meant to feel slightly outraged by the social arrogance of the suggestion. Charlotte in fact emits a weak reproof by stating that "they are not dumb or toothless", although she does not question the term yokels, which contains the derogatory connotation of being rural and unsophisticated. However, the impression of her moral outrage is later cancelled out by the actual appearance of the North Carolina couple, which is far from flattering. Besides the sartorial stigmatization described earlier, the couple are also shown to be lacking any of the emotional empathy of the upper middle-class couple when they admit that they have suddenly changed their mind about giving up their baby. When Harry asks them why they still chose to come and meet them and put them through all the trauma of disappointed expectations, the father replies simply: "We'd never seen New York". While Harry is clearly upset about such a facile suggestion, Charlotte looks at the couple with an expression of benevolent understanding, in the way you would towards two children. While her smile might indicate sympathy, it also smacks of deep-seated class paternalism, a feeling that could be summed up in the phrase, "forgive them, for they do not know what they do".

The same scene also further accentuates the ignorance and lack of cultural sophistication of the North Carolina couple. Harry for example

[8] The character played by Amy Poehler in the feature film *Baby Mama* (2008) represents yet another incarnation of the "white trash" cum hillbilly stereotype, complete with the peroxide blonde look.

asks whether "anyone [would] like more 'lax'" which the bewildered father answers with another question: "Is that the fish?". The comic effect here could arguably come from Harry's pompous use of language, which betrays his upper middle-class status, but the sheepish and subservient attitude of the father is what stands out more. Humor also occurs when the birth mother explains she has started to think of a name for the baby: "I like Tiffany, Britney. Wayne says I like any name with an [i:] on the end" (*SAC* 6.20). The line, emphasizing once more the couple's simple taste, is delivered in the tone of a thick, if somewhat childish, Southern working-class accent, once again stigmatizing regional and class differences. Perhaps then, what was meant to be funny about Charlotte's friend's cynical remark was the thrill of daring to laugh at someone "telling it like it is", unhampered by considerations of political correctness.

All of these character elements correspond to what Barbara Ehrenreich has observed as forming part of the predominant middle-class media representation of the working class as stupid, inarticulate and lacking in taste (2007: n.p.). If we agree with Rosalind Gill that "representations matter" (2007: 7), what then is the significance of these media stereotypes? Of course, comedy cannot exist without some form of caricaturing. Moreover, as mentioned previously, characters, especially in sitcoms, need to be immediately recognizable for the humor to be effective. However, while the use of types (that is the division of people into categories) seems hard to avoid, not all types need be stereotypes (Hall 1997: 257-258). The practice of stereotyping does something besides arranging reality, it "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference'" (Hall 1997: 258). Stereotypes cannot simply be explained away as "a harmless form of social shorthand: a fast track to recognising the characteristics of a person, group or situation" (Casey et al. 2002: 229). One could in fact argue that such stereotyping practices found in the mass media can be seen as a form of "symbolic violence" (Hall 1997: 259) directed by one privileged group—the men (and women) in charge of production—against the "silenced majority" (Ehrenreich 2007: n.p.) of working-class people.

In what follows, I will look more specifically and critically at these representations and their relation to the ideologies of gender, motherhood and reproduction.

Class, gender and reproduction

One of the main aims of second-wave feminism was to raise women's consciousness and knowledge about their own bodies. In the portrayal of Erica in *Friends*, one can surmise that working-class women have remained unaffected by feminist struggles or discourse. Indeed, although Erica is the one carrying the child, she has no awareness whatsoever of the workings of her body, something around which a significant part of the comedy of the episodes centers. Thus, much of the humor in the plot line is linked to Erica's hair-raisingly limited understanding of what is happening to her physically. This constitutes one more aspect that divides biological mother and prospective adoptive mother and another way to bring into relief the contrast between the two women's relative social competence, not least in the crucial task of raising children. The most striking example in this respect appears in the episode entitled "The one with Rachel's going away party" in which Erica comes back from a trip to the city[9] with pains in her stomach. Replying to the question whether she is alright, Erica says "Yeah, you know, maybe I ate too much. I keep getting these stomach aches. They come and go like every few minutes." Monica, together with the audience (but not Chandler), understands straight away what is going on: Monica and Phoebe exchange knowing looks in a show of (middle-class) female complicity, before Monica explains with great agitation: "She doesn't have a stomach ache, she's in labor!" (*F* 10.16), confirming to us that Erica needs someone to interpret the language of her body for her. It is also revealing to note here the use of the third-person pronoun 'she', which reifies Erica as an object and distances her further from her own body. This scene ends farcically with Monica completing her displacement of the birth mother by taking the seat she previously occupied and miming the process of labor herself by falsely hyperventilating and covering her own tummy as if it were she who was giving birth to the baby.

While we are clearly supposed to laugh at Monica's over-the-top reaction, the scene also serves to destabilize the meaning attached to the pregnant body and to detach the connection of motherhood from the

[9] Just as in *Sex and the City*, visiting New York seems a really attractive bonus for biological mothers considering adoption.

biological mother—thus signifying that Erica is no more than a vessel. Since Monica can read the physical signs but Erica cannot, the former thereby rightfully assumes the role of mother in the eyes of the audience. After all, we have already been assured by Chandler in the episode where they meet Erica for the first time that Monica is "loving and devoted and caring […] A mother without a baby" (*F* 10.9), implying that Erica, even though pregnant, is clearly not to be mistaken for a mother.

Similarly, Erica's doubts about the identity of her baby's father also constitute a sign of her incompetence both as a woman and as a mother. Although Chandler and Monica are for a while worried that the father of their future child might be a young man who Erica had sex with and who is now in prison for killing his father with a shovel, Monica finally reassures Chandler by explaining to him why it could not have been the aptly nicknamed Shovely Joe:

> Monica: Well, it turns out that Erica didn't pay much attention in Sex Ed class, because the thing she did with that prison guy... it'd be pretty hard to make a baby that way
>
> Chandler: Oh God! What was it? The thing that we hardly ever do or the thing we *never* do?
>
> Monica: The thing we never do

To which Chandler smiles and nods in a knowing way, pronouncing the name "Shovely Joe" with certain admiration (*F* 10.13). The comment leaves it to the imagination of the audience to decide whether the reference to the daring sexual habits of the lovers involves fellatio or anal intercourse. Without doubt, the nickname "Shovely Joe" is also inscribed by images of working-class and rurality. Shovel is the tool of a laborer, also suggesting connotations of dirt or perhaps even shit. The popular expression "shoveling shit" would also tie in with the allusion to anal sex. Besides revealing Erica's dumb-founded ignorance, the humor of this scene also draws on the opposition between two different images of masculinities that are contrasted by class, not least the idea, dear for instance to D.H. Lawrence, that the working class are less sexually inhibited than the middle class. Chandler is for a moment somewhat in awe of a man who can get what he wants from a woman sexually—it is doubtless Monica who sets the limits to their sexual activities. The other side of the coin, however, is the connotation of working-class animality and primitivism. This is a trope that goes back much further than

Lawrence of course, already present in the Victorian period in Britain when the urban poor were demonized as being sexually promiscuous and brutalized by their life in the slums.[10] Another aspect to this stereotype was the suggestion of the unbridled fertility of working-class and rural people, which was contrasted to the sexual abstemiousness or even sterility of urban and upper-middle-class people—something also evident in Lawrence's portrayal of the aristocratic Clifford Chatterley in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In *Friends*, it is also suggested by Chandler that he is unable to give Monica a child and that Erica is not only allowing Monica to become a mother, but also for him to become a real man.

The sexual element of the *Friends* episode further underpins other aspects of social prejudice by indicating that although less privileged economically, working-class men possess certain patriarchal privileges—that of not having to deal with feministically conscious women who refuse to serve men sexually in any way they like. At the same time, it also reveals yet another difference between Erica and Monica, where the latter appears as more liberated from a feminist standpoint in that she asserts her own bodily integrity in her sexual relations with Chandler. In contrast, Erica seems uncaring of her body, unreflecting about the ways in which it is used either sexually or reproductively.

Yet another example of Erica's lack of connection with her body is the fact that she is unwittingly about to give birth to twins (*F* 10.17-18). The information she is given during pregnancy of the existence of two heartbeats she misinterprets as being that of her own and that of the baby. Thus, once again her body seems to have a life of its own about which she is only vaguely aware.[11] It also gives rise to another scene that serves to define Monica as a "natural" mother in contrast to Erica, when she

[10] See for example Barret-Ducrocq's discussion of the predominant characterization of the laboring classes in terms of their loose sexual morality, something that was seen as a threat to the social order (1991: 2) or Pia Laskar's study of the interactions of categories of class, race and gender in the construction of a normative heterosexuality in the nineteenth century (2007: 44-64).

[11] *Baby Mama* makes similar use of such plot elements when Angie (Amy Poehler) believes that she is faking her pregnancy while being unaware that she really is pregnant.

objects to Chandler's doubts about what to do with the second child by claiming: "They are our children!". The birth and adoption of two babies is thus quickly accommodated by Monica, who cannot conceive of the possibility of giving up the other child, thus signaling her sense of responsibility as a middle-class mother who will take care of both babies. The corresponding lack of impact on Erica seems merely to emphasize her fecundity, rather than her maternal feelings. Abundant and effortless fertility is also associated with the birth mother in *Desperate Housewives*, whose labor is over before Gabrielle and Carlos even arrive at the hospital. Her only comment is: "The kid just slipped right out" (*DH* 2.18), almost like an evacuation. In this case, however, the prolificacy of the working class is sanctioned only when it serves the purposes of the middle class. Their bodies are objectified as vessels that produce what is required to fulfill the lives of the middle-class couples.

Just as in *Friends*, reproductive capacity is contrasted to maternal feeling in *Desperate Housewives*. While Gabrielle is hardly represented as an ideal mother, her character traits are clearly enhanced by the short time she spends mothering her adopted baby. Although she delegates most of the daily maternal tasks to her maid Xiao Mei, the last scene of episode 20 shows Gabrielle heart-broken and almost hysterical, as any good mother would be, at having to give up the child. This image appears in stark contradiction to that of the scantily-dressed biological mother, who cursorily announces that since her boyfriend is now off drugs, they have decided to "give the family thing a go" (*DH* 2.20). Magically, the maternal instinct in Gabrielle has had time to kick in, despite all expectations and she suddenly appears as a much more caring parent compared to, in her own words, "the white trash freak show" (*DH* 2.18) that are the biological parents.

Assisted reproduction and feminism

Most certainly, these representations of the issue of adoption in all three series are not unilaterally conventional or conservative. As I have noted, they can sometimes be seen to incorporate aspects of the rhetoric of feminism. If one considers the stigma attached to infertility among women for example, the increasing number of female characters who personify the problem in television and films can perhaps be interpreted as a positive step forward. Indeed, as Christine Ward Gailey argues, not only birth mothers but also adoptive mothers have usually been thought of as unnatural in the popular imagination, the former because she voluntarily relinquishes her child, the latter because of her "failed womanhood" (2000: 19). These depictions of women unable (or unwilling as in the case of Gabrielle) to give birth to their own children reduce their stigmatization, as well as undermining the dichotomy between nature and culture when it comes to motherhood. However, it is also significant to note that the removal of the stigma for one category of infertile, upper middle-class women, does not translate to lower-class women, who are either seen contemplating or indeed actually relinquishing their children. The former category of middle-class women thus project culture in opposition to the other lower-class women's nature, a binary where culture is clearly valued higher. Class in this context is, moreover, the pivot around which the contrast of nature/culture is articulated. This shows how the gains for some women in terms of representation are not automatically transferred to other categories of women.

In relation to the birth mothers, one could also argue that the series (especially *Friends*, since it is the only one where the birth mother actually gives away her child as promised to the adoptive parents) help to debunk the myth of a maternal instinct, this latter being another long-standing feminist point of debate. First-wave feminist activist and theorist Charlotte Perkins Gilman for example conceptually divorced maternity from motherhood, claiming that the physical experience of pregnancy and birth did not necessarily make a woman a mother. In this way, she sought both to subvert received ideas about maternal instinct, as well as re-value the function of childcare in society.[12] However, the birth mothers are clearly not the ones with whom the television viewers are meant to identify. Instead, it is the middle-class women who re-inscribe motherhood as the crowning achievement of a woman's life who are meant to deserve our admiration. Indeed, although the series rehabilitate women suffering from infertility, they do not question the compulsory nature of motherhood, at least for middle-class women.

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[12] See Avril (2008), 135-163.

Seen from a marxist-feminist perspective, one could also argue that the references to payment or rewards for the birth mothers (cash, trips to New York, hotel and mini-bar expenditure, etc.) in connection with the adoption process undermine the sharp distinction usually made between the spheres of production and reproduction. When a price can be put on reproductive labor, it effectively shows that "women's labour in pregnancy and childbirth has potential market value, and that it is indeed productive labour" (Dickenson 2001: 209).[13] It is significant in this respect that the stigma attached to the birth mothers is not linked to them being pregnant but to their lack of emotional and intellectual capacities. This is in line with the fact that in today's reproductive market, these women are seen to possess valuable commodities that can become the objects of exchange. This was not always the case however, as Mary Shanley explains: "During the first two decades of the twentieth century, women who bore a child outside of marriage was considered a 'fallen woman,' shamefully weak or immoral" (2001: 16). The stigma attached to unmarried white mothers gradually lessened as they were encouraged to relinquish their child for adoption. This did not extend to black mothers, however, as white offspring was valued higher than that of other women in the reproductive market (Shanley 2001: 16-17; McElroy 2002: 332)—something evident also in the series themselves.

This materialist connection between reproduction, production and consumption is most emphasized in *Desperate Housewives*, something that fits well in with the general consumerist lifestyle depicted in the series. The question of adoption introduced by the voice-over of the narrator represents Gabrielle as a voracious shopper who does not settle for anything but the best, even when the latest product she desires is a live baby. That the baby is a commodity is made clear from the beginning and later re-inforced by the attitude of the birth mother who sees it as an opportunity for money (*DH* 2.17). The adoption storyline in *Sex and the City* is, in contrast, marginal to the rest of the episode, which focuses primarily on Carrie Bradshaw's peregrinations in Paris. We learn

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[13] This should not be understood as inherently positive however, since as Dickenson argues, the needs of reproduction remain subordinated to the needs of production, rather than the other way around. It also potentially expands the scope of exploitation of women's reproductive labor (2001: 213).

therefore very little about the actual reasons why the birth parents consider giving their child away. However, as I have discussed above, the birth parents' sightseeing trip to New York can be interpreted as a form of economic exchange. Their moral reprehensibility is also compounded by them taking material advantage of the situation, while failing to fulfill their own end of the adoption bargain.

Insofar as she delivers the goods, Erica is the least morally questionable of the three birth mothers. While this can be explained in terms of the sitcom genre itself (Erica deciding to keep her child would be hard to turn into unadulterated comedy), it nonetheless results in her regaining some of her dignity through serving a higher maternal purpose. She may be a simpleton but she knows her place and her obligation of usefulness to the middle class.

A consideration of a liberal feminist standpoint, in which notions of the individual and of choice are paramount, can also point to another interesting element regarding the series' portrayal of adoption. As with surrogacy, adoption involves a legal contract whereby one woman signs away her parental rights to someone else. A key liberal argument in defense of surrogacy contracts, and of their legal enforceability, is that to deny a woman's right to enter into such a contract and limit her obligation to fulfill it would imply that women "are not competent, by virtue of their biological sex, to act as rational, moral agents regarding their reproductive activity" (Shalev quoted in Shanley 2001: 106)—an image of women that feminists would of course not want to promulgate. In the series under discussion, the portrayals of birth mothers appear somewhat contradictory in this respect. In order for the audience to accept the fact that birth mothers would give up their children, they have to be seen making an informed choice as rational human beings. The birth mother in *Desperate Housewives* for example justifies her choice to have her baby adopted both through the imposition on her job and the appeal of financial gain. Although cast as morally dubious, the mother still makes a choice, she is not brow-beaten or driven by desperation into doing it. At the same time, in order for the audience fully to support the child transaction, they have to be made to appear less competent than the prospective adoptive mothers. The portrayal of Erica in *Friends* is particularly revealing in this respect. As discussed above, for most of the time she appears on screen, Erica is depicted as a simpleton. The first episode in which she figures, where she chooses the adoptive parents for her baby, offers, however, a striking contrast, since it is Chandler and especially Monica who we are meant to be critical of,[14] while Erica behaves much more rationally in discussing their suitability as parents. When she comes to New York, however, it is revealing to see her transformation into the naïve country bumpkin who shows a risible level of ignorance about her own pregnant body. If Erica had been consistently portrayed as an idiot, this would have created an element of moral doubt about the issue of adoption, as Monica and Chandler could have been seen as exploiting a vulnerable and powerless woman. Instead they somehow manage to convince us that Erica both made an informed choice and yet is comically unaware and incompetent.

Thus, although the birth mother's choice to give up her child on delivery needs to be cast in some positive light for it not to reflect badly on the adoptive parents (as is the case in *Friends*), a dichotomy becomes inevitable between on the one hand "fit reproducers" (or at least fit enough) and "fit mothers" (Corea, Hanmer et al. 1987: 9). In other words, women as mothers are split "into two related, largely rival entities: the 'legitimate' and the 'unnatural' mother" (Mc Elroy 2002: 326).

Just as the motto of the American Birth Control League in the early twentieth century used to be "more from the fit, less from the unfit," there is a certain eugenic ring to this contemporary representation of designated adoption in the television series I have been discussing, but with a twist. Indeed, eugenics is perhaps not the right term here, since what is at stake is not the genetic pool of the child and of its birth parents,[15] but the social class and status of the adoptive parents. As a

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[14] Monica and Chandler are initially compromised in that they lie to the birth mother about who they are in order to get her child, passing respectively as a priest and a doctor. The dilemma is however resolved before the episode's conclusion, where the adoptive couple is re-established as being worthy of receiving the child.

[15] This element forms, however, a significant part of the humor both in *Friends* and *Desperate Housewives*. Indeed the whole "Shovely Joe" episode in *Friends* is about ensuring that the father of Erica's child is the college kid and not the guy in prison for killing his father. In *Desperate Housewives*, Gabrielle rejects

result, the expression "less [for] the unfit" does not suggest, as the original expression once did, that working-class people should be discouraged from procreating. It could almost be seen as promoting the opposite, since the babies of underprivileged fertile (white) mothers can become valuable exchange products on the market. However, the particular mothering skills of wealthy women are most certainly portrayed as being more desirable, and thus more fitting in with the ideal of the bourgeois nuclear family. Indeed, as I have pointed out, much of the comic element is based on the contrast between working-class birth mothers who show little indication of maternal feeling and capacity and the much more suitably responsible and financially secure middle-class couples. These representations thus drive a wedge between different categories of women, as some female characters' perspective is legitimized and naturalized, while others are marginalized or vilified. In the final analysis, motherhood is constructed in these series as a middle-class prerogative, which is translated in both material and moral terms and is thus significantly revealing of both gender and class prejudices.

Conclusion

My discussion of the narrative elements of these three television series has been informed by a critical desire to challenge some of the implicit ideological suppositions about gender and class that these episodes contain. In this work of deconstruction, an overriding pattern has emerged about the nature of popular television. Ultimately, as Richard Butsch has pointed out, one finds that "[s]trewn across our mass media are portrayals of class that justify class relations of modern capitalism" (2003: 575). In the specific context of these series, the depiction of adoption constructs a dichotomy of images between a working class that appears only good enough to procreate and a middle class that is clearly better suited to taking on the task of bringing up baby.

Of course, television viewers might certainly interpret or make sense of these shows very differently, not least depending on their own class

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several birth mothers for their lack of good looks as she does not want to inherit an ugly baby.

and gender positioning. The ideological articulation of reproduction, class and gender found in these storylines might not achieve hegemonic status, since they might in fact be actively resisted or adapted. In this respect, it is perhaps also significant to note that the adoption plot lines appear in the very last season of both *Friends* and *Sex and the City* and are eventually resolved in the final episode, tying up all the loose ends. The formation of a nuclear family with a baby in *Friends* adds a constructed element of closure to the show that appears in complete opposition to the condition of singlehood and tight-knit friendships which defined the previous ten-long-year existence of the series. In this feel-good ending of *Friends*, Monica and Chandler have also purchased a suburban home which, together with having a child, Chandler describes as a sign of their finally "growing up" (*F* 10.10). This however also signals their growing out of the framework narrative of the television screen. Although the formation of a nuclear family is presented as a crowning achievement, it remains nonetheless narratively marginalized, lacking either in sufficient audience drawing power or comic potential.[16]

As I have tried to show, the concept of class, while remaining an elusive element in the critical debate, still offers powerful analytical possibilities to explore what is going on below the surface of popular television series. In fiction as well as in reality, class constitutes one of those "shadowy lines that still divide" (Scott and Leonhart 2005), not least in relation to reproductive labor, be it biological or social. In the treatment of adoption in television series, however, this complex issue, still fraught by class and gender tensions, has been made the subject of light entertainment that aims to leave the audience with no troubling afterthoughts. But perhaps, when all is said and done, that is the ultimate ideological function of mainstream popular cultural representations.

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[16] Interestingly, the other children are almost totally absent from the series. Ben, Ross' son in *Friends*, is brought up by his ex-wife and her female partner and rarely appears on screen. Rachel and Ross's daughter Emma remains similarly anonymous.

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“In movies, someone always has to play the bad guy”: Mediatized Subjectivities and Youth Media Production

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Abstract

This article draws on a short ethnography from a media education class in a suburban Canadian high school (School X). I connect understanding of mediatization with subjectivities to analyze participants’ video topic and genre preferences. I conclude with a call for media educators to challenge hierarchies that determine who is “given” a voice and who has influence within media education classes and projects.

Fish and media

> Just as water constitutes an a priori condition for the fish, so do media for humans. Like Kant’s understanding of the “always-already” existing categories of time and space that are constitutive of experience, media today can be said to structure our awareness of time, shape our attentions and emotions, and provide us with the means for forming and expressing thought itself. Media, in slightly different terms, become epistemology: the grounds for knowledge and knowing itself.
>
> (Friesen and Hug 2009: 5)

The epistemological primacy of media and the process of construction and reconstruction of mediatized subjectivities are central to the analysis of data presented in this article. Hjarvard (2008) states that mediatization is a

> double-sided process of high modernity in which the media on the one hand emerge as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate to. On the other hand, media simultaneously become an integrated part of other institutions like politics, work, family, and religion as more and more of these institutional activities are performed through both interactive and mass media. (105)

To take schooling as an example, policy makers’ views of education and “good” policy are shaped by mass media and how they think media will interpret their policies to voters. However, who influences who and how is complex. Government is influenced by but also influences coverage of education by providing quick stories for busy reporters. Similarly youth come to their work in media production with previous mediatized understanding of what a "good" education is and how a "normal" young person should behave. Media in turn interpret the desires of youth to market to them, but this does not mean youth are dupes or that all interpret media in the same way. Instead, as I will show in this article youth like adults are submerged in media that are constitutive of different subjectivities.

In this article I connect understanding of mediatization with subjectivities and use the term "mediatized subjectivities" to ground my analysis of how participant youths articulate and position their media voices in relation to their self-perceptions.

Ortner (2005) defines subjectivity:

> By subjectivity I will mean the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth that animate acting subjects. But I always mean as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought and so on. (31)

By looking at subjectivities we can look at how, within social, cultural and political structures, participants are positioned, resist positioning, and position others. The concept of mediatized subjectitvies is a framework for understanding how participants come to their understandings about "good", "funny" or "effective" video.

Buckingham and Sefton-Green (2003) argue that through their engagement with popular culture children and youth are "learning how to behave, what to want and to feel, and how to respond." They further argue that pedagogy is therefore a debate about the "production of subjectivities" or "forms of consciousness" (393). For example, how do youth who identify or are identified as Chinese-Canadians walk the cultural context in which anyone that is not white and of Anglophone origin is not seen as an "authentic" Canadian?

Observing and talking with youth engaged in media production offers a rich opportunity to examine how "popular culture texts position young people to assume subjectivities that are heavily informed by the ideologies and discourses of popular/corporate culture" (Savage 2008: 51). The process of youth media production can seem contradictory. In one video there may be elements that challenge sexist and racist popular culture narratives whereas at other points the same video uses racist and sexist tropes. Of course, this is similar to popular culture itself which can be oppressive while at other times provide a gap for a counter-narrative.

Jenkins (1997) argues that video production by youth can be reactionary and imitative of oppression in the larger society. Fleetwood (2005) has demonstrated youth can often reproduce problematic constructions of sexuality, race and gender in a manner that is unproblematized and can reaffirm their privileged or marginalized status. Still others such as Goodman (2005) have looked at the possibilities for collective video work in uncovering oppression, presenting alternative representations and politically intervening to create more equitable communities.

At School X video production took place within a specific context that played a part in the participants' story and genre choices. These choices are made within this glocalized context—participants share in generally American cultural products but they do so within global/local cultural contexts. These contexts differed for the participants. They were all within the same culture and lived in the same geographical community but they also came with different national identities, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds that influenced how they took up popular culture or what they were permitted to take up while remaining "authentic."

The project task for the participants was to think about media representations of their school and/or untold stories that they wanted to tell about students, staff and community members who were part of School X. As I will show, the way a group of 4 male participants interpreted the videos—their own and that of other participants—shows a sharp awareness of the role of media in structuring adult and youth understanding of self and other. It also shows a strong sense of being individuals with their own way of humorously recombining media montage alongside original "interviews" with peers and politicians. This article will look at the decisions the participants made in this process and connect it to mediatized subjectivities. In the last part of the article I will examine how media education might use discussion of mediatized subjectivities to explore who gets to say what and to what effect? How might some youth in the process of being constructed as being given a voice through media production get reinscribed as lucky helpees? Conversely, how might other youth with more economic and social capital be positioned through video production classes as learning to take their rightful place as citizens with influence? To explore these issues I developed the following questions to focus my analysis for this article:

1. How are mediatized subjectivities understood by four white male participants in a youth media production project?

2. How are mediatized subjectivities constructed and constrained based on categories such as gender and race?

3. How might media education be a place to explore notions of voice versus influence?

The study

A central objective of this research is a semiotic analysis of videos produced by the participants. The category of youth however useful is also simplistic. Through looking at the different decisions participants made around techniques, frames and genre in their video we can see youth as occupying many positions and their video production decisions as proxies for mediatized subjectitvies, which I will detail in this article.

14 ethnically diverse 14-18 year-olds (5 girls and 9 boys) studying at School X participated in the present study. They created six videos about issues that they felt were misrepresented by media, such as youth violence or media effects. At the beginning of the course there were 8 girls. One girl was expelled from the school. She still helped her video partner with her video, but she was not allowed in the school so did not formally maintain her involvement. Another girl became ill and had to quit and one girl was in her senior year and determined the project would cut too much into her time to study for final exams.

The video production lasted over 40 hours. Some participants met outside of this time to work on their videos and made email contact with my assistant or me if they wished to discuss ideas or if they had technical questions. Most of the hours were during school time but we also met over 2 Saturdays. Many of the participants received high school course credit and all received an honorarium for their participation. The honorarium was meant to allow participants the ability to take a Saturday off work to participate in the project.

I recruited participants through a school counselor who I had worked with in the first phase of a three-phased funded research project. She spoke to a media arts teacher who also recruited participants for Phase II of this project. Some of the participants were successful academically and engaged in their school. Other participants were close to expulsion and others spoke of struggling with school, work and family responsibilities. Socio-economic status also varied with some participants speaking quite openly about living in poverty and others from middle-class backgrounds. Some saw themselves as very politically active (primarily the white boys) and others said they did not have interest in political issues.

The reader will note interesting names such as “Patio Furniture.” Participants created their own pseudonyms.

Data collection and analysis

Data consists of interviews before and after the course, flip charts from group activities, field-notes, and the actual videos. In the baseline interviews I focused on why participants decided to enroll in the project, their experience creating media, their thoughts about the media they engaged with, their thoughts about how their family and peers engaged with media and what they hoped to get out of the project.

I chose to have a research assistant conduct post-interviews. I thought participants might feel freer to be critical of the project. Overall this worked well although two participants did not show up for the interview and after a couple more attempts we gave up on interviewing them.

Whose school is this?

School X had received some bad press coverage for an incident involving a weapon several years before the study took place. I started the project at School X by asking the participants how they themselves and others perceived their school. Within minutes it was clear there were different assumptions and emotions about media representations of the school. The group of participants who were predominately white and male talked about the school being a place that was inclusive. One of the young women, who subsequently withdrew from the project to devote more time to studying, wanted to boast the representation of School X for the sake of her younger sibling. She was worried that if the school had a bad reputation it would lessen her sibling’s career and post-secondary options. Two white participants, who were involved in the student council, were clear they wanted to create videos that portrayed the school in a positive light and seemed agitated with an Aboriginal student who emphatically stated racism did exist in the school.

A group of four participants of Asian descent sat together and joked about racism, but one of these participants focused on how he made fun of new Chinese kids who couldn't speak English. He himself had only been in Canada for a couple of years. They spoke of white students "telling them to go home" but they stated they did not see this as racism. In a later interview a young Chinese male who was the most dominant member in the group stated emphatically that "teenagers are lazy" and that "it's dumb to try and change things"

The participants chose their small groups for creating the videos. Three video mentors in their early twenties assisted participants in the production and editing process. A professional storyteller assisted with developing the visual storytelling abilities of participants. The group of boys I will focus my discussion on saw themselves as being very conversant in video and storytelling and resisted much assistance from the adults who were part of the project. The other groups worked closely with their video mentors and the other three adults involved in the project. The participants were shown examples of videos by youth that used a video poem, a rant, drama and documentary genres. They were told they could choose what they wanted to do. Some of the videos they were shown used humour and others were more serious and documentary in nature. The topic parameter was to include something to do with School X, youth and media.

The videos

A central component of my analysis is how participants deploy categories "minorities" and "Natives" and the normal "boy" or "girl" in their videos and discussion of other participants' videos. What is important is that these categories are employed to denote otherness from what is constructed as the dominant white majority. In fact, the term "visible minority" in the context of the community in which School X is located is not based on percentage of people of European heritage versus not. Many people have parents with multiple origins and may "look" white but identify as Asian-Canadian. I use the category "racialized minorities" to denote that these youth are constructed as being foreigners, regardless of whether their families have been in Canada longer than fellow students who appear white. Despite the thousands of cultures and backgrounds a “visible minority” might come from, the term is used as a unifier in the dominant narrative of Canadian multiculturalism. The racialization of students happens within peer groups but it is important to remember it is also endemic in the school curriculum that represents Europeans as discovering Canada. The mediatization of indigeneity in the school curriculum and popular culture construct indigenous peoples as homogenous and troubled and troublesome. Finally, debates around the crisis of boys or the moral panic around girls and sexuality revolve around normalized and schooled ways of being a girl versus a boy. It is with these problematics in mind that I point to the social construction of the participant’s topics and membership composition.

In total the participants produced 6 short videos. The five groups (one group produced two videos) separated largely based on friendship networks, gender and ethnicity. Four white boys produced a spoof on media representation of youth, which I am calling *Media Spoof*. The second group consisted of two girls, one identified as aboriginal and the other as white and working class. They produced two videos, one was about racism and reclaiming indigenous culture and the other was about depression. The third group, consisting of four participants, two girls and two boys all of whom were racialized minorities, produced a film about exclusion. The fourth group was a white boy and a white girl who produced a video rant in opposition to a curriculum change and the final group was two white boys who created a video on negative representations of skateboarding.

Some of the participants did not want to share their videos publicly so I am not using the titles of their videos. I will focus on *Media Spoof* and observations, discussion and interviews with the four creators of this video—Oxpig, Megatron, Patio Furniture and Tim. I also look at their understandings of the video productions of the other participants.

I chose to focus on these four participants because they themselves and the other participants saw them as skilled video producers. They were also older than some of the other participants and seemed to have high status in the class. Finally, in interviews, other participants often seemed to see *Media Spoof* as an example of a “good” video and referred to it most often.

Who gets to say what and how do they get to say it?

Example #1—Subjectivities and the irony of mediatized politics

Part of *Media Spoof* is a critique of adult perceptions of youth. Patio Furniture had clear views about issues around adult censorship of youth video and the creative potential of youth. He is critical of the notion that youth cannot be trusted to know what is best for them but adults can.

> **Patio Furniture**: I think that's not true because like Hollywood is run by adults so. [laughter] It's like, I mean, in fact it would be the reverse that you'd get a lot of the same stuff if you got adult supervision type of thing as opposed to something totally different, maybe strange, but maybe really totally different.

Media Spoof starts with the producers resisting positioning of youth and their school. They show images of the war in Iraq with one of the boys acting as a news anchor. It continues with another of the young men interviewing young people with loaded questions about whether they use drugs. The story goes on to parental concern about media violence and back to images of war in Iraq. The absurdity of adults focusing on youth playing violent video games rather than actual adult created violence is thought provoking and amusing. From this point the film moves on to camp humour that positions others such as homeless people, prostitutes and a politician who does not speak fluent English as objects of comic relief. The movie moves on to one of the producers/actor vomiting and another producer/actor with wig acting like a ditsy girl who is hit by a male. All the acts are in reference to various current popular culture shows. Still here there are multiple ways of interpreting. The producers spoke of making fun of stereotypical representations as well as using stereotypes to make people laugh.

The participants' explanation of the video varied. Oxpig explained the use of humour to critique media representations of youth and School X in particular.

> **Oxpig:** you get the message a little bit easier than some other, like some other films where you're just kind of being drilled over and over with facts and some other boring person talking… because I think it's funny, if people do decide to use it in the classroom I think teachers might have a better response to it.

> **Patio Furniture:** I think they'll [the audience] recognize that…we sort of did some satire on the media and stuff but more than anything it's us being stupid. [laughter]
>
> **Tim:** I think like Megatron said, I'm pretty sure it's not going to change one's perspective so you'll be like, wow, the media is like, like it really can do that. But, it's kind of, you know, it still has that idea and it's funny.

Media Spoof at times seems to be a satirical political critique of adult, particularly journalistic perceptions of youth but at other times familiar sexist and racist tropes are used. They critique the stereotypes of young video-gamers and violence for example, but make use of sexist cultural narratives about "skeazy prostitutes" and corrupt foreign politicians with accents all within the same video.

Media Spoof makes fun of popular culture by repeating many of the same techniques and tropes in some places and challenging them through irony in other places. Irony plays an important role in the articulation of their mediatized subjectivities. To make fun of the absurdity of "serious" news that focuses on youth video-gamers rather than the mass destruction in Iraq requires an insider status. It requires knowing how media taps into adult fears of youth, and dominant notions of newsworthiness. Within this they are knowledgeable about adult hysteria over youth and lack of attention to real war and death. They have sophisticated knowledge of common stereotypes, metaphors and tropes used to describe youth, and war. This knowledge gives them the right to laugh about uncritical viewers. By making fun of people who are unduly influenced by media representations of youth and war the *Media Spoof* producers show that they understand the uncritical insider but they are not one. In the example I give above the producers show their status as outsiders to the process of creating mainstream news but insiders in mainstream forms of media critique, such as the *Daily Show* or *Colbert.* They also position themselves as insiders to "youth culture" through frequent reference to popular television shows aimed at teenagers. The insider/outsider stance also allows the producers to engage in what might be otherwise censored or criticized by adults and peers as sexist and racist.

Example #2—Pop culture subjectivity and blending in

The *Media Spoof* producers were sure all youth would understand the references they made to popular culture in their video, but Ooot-ang-chalk, a newcomer to Canada, felt he was missing many of the references in the video.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think you're affected by media?
>
> **Ooot-ang-chalk:** Not as much as I would like to be…
>
> **Interviewer:** Why do you want to be more affected by media?
>
> **Ooot-ang-chalk:** Well, blend in I guess. I don't know.

Ooot-ang-chalk lives within a globalized and localized media environment. He brings with him his interpretations of American media, but he disrupts notions of a homogeneous youth culture. Understanding pop culture is not merely knowing and regurgitating popular culture references but having the ability to combine and recombine these references in the process of articulating mediatized subjectivities. Pop culture may be ridiculed and criticized. Many of the participants spoke in the interviews of their concern that media had a negative effect on younger siblings. Some admitted it affected them but usually referred to others as being more affected. However, those without knowledge of pop culture and contextual interpretations of it, such as Ooot-ang-Chalk are outsiders rather than being self-reflexive insider/outsiders.

Example # 3—Subjectivities and mediatized othering

> In movies, someone always has to play the bad guy or there's some girl that just has to play like a loose character and unintentionally they might make her blond. But they might make the bad guy black. And they might find that offensive only because they're minorities. (Tim)

In this example it is clear that racism or sexism is not seen as the problem but instead the problem is how the objects of racism and sexism negatively interpret these representations. It is seen as natural and essential for the historical tropes to be performed for media to be effective. The historical embeddings of representations is masked by the currency and timeliness to media products, whether news, youth production or soaps. However, the producers of *Media Spoof* provide different explanations for the use of stereotypes, particularly in the choices made for their video:

> **Oxpig:** Um. Like, again, it's hard to answer some of these because it's like, I don't know, I find myself just like most of the stuff bounces off me. But like when you see some other people the stereotypes just kind of, instead of bouncing off they seem to kind of submerge into them and make them themselves. So it's kind of bad, but in some ways it's kind of good. I mean if you use stereotypes in a movie… it's easier for the audience to identify with the character immediately.

Here both Tim and Oxpig are demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of mainstream media and of the process of othering. They explain the process by which someone interprets media as individual and psychological; therefore minorities might find it offensive not because it is but "only because they're minorities". Furthermore, if a minority or girl replicates a stereotype she/he is demonstrating a lack of ability to have stuff "bounce off them". Again it is an individual's issue of choice or personality rather than the political, social and economic structuring elements that construct one's subjectivities and allows and constrains their ability to resist. Through this process creating alternative frames for the effective movie is based on insider knowledge of the normalized othering frames.

Example # 4—Subjectivities and Mediatized Essentializing

Bob the Builder's (BB's) aim in producing her video was to show the pain of racism that she experienced in life, but also her sense of place in an Aboriginal drumming group. In talking about their opinion of BB's video Megatron and Tim state:

> **Megatron:** I think the video was certainly a challenge to the stereotype.
>
> **Tim:** But to your point, I mean like, the idea that these kids are calling this girl alcoholic and, she's like, I want to dance [laughter].
>
> **Megatron**: Yeah.

> **Tim:** Like she didn't make a point. She could have turned it over and had some positive attitude about how great Natives are and how spiritual they are.

In a second example Megatron illustrates how minority status is used by those with power to project equality and respect for Aboriginal peoples.

> **Megatron:** Actually, I heard, this is kind of one of the teams Chicago Redskins… people who are not Native had complained that it was offensive to Natives. When they actually asked Native Americans they said, no we're happy. You know, we're a little bit proud of that.

In these examples we see the power of how two non-aboriginal young males come to the same understanding of indigeneity that is dominant in what are often represented as positive representations of indigenous people. These interpretations provide the subject positions of Indian warrior or spiritual healer. Neither subject position is a challenge to racialization but instead naturalizes it. BB's video is challenging to the illusion of diversity as synonym for social justice. Her video is about her emerging understanding of spirituality through drumming but it is also about how her emerging understanding helps her to resist how she is categorized as troubled and troublesome at school and in popular culture.

Example #5—Subjectivities and mediatized racism

In the dialogue below we see Megatron, Patio Furniture and Tim thinking through what is racist versus being politically correct or minorities taking things too seriously.

> **Megatron:** I really don't agree with anything politically correct or anything… if someone wants to preach like Nazi philosophy… on their video. If you can make a valid point, a valid argument then…
>
> **Patio Furniture**: Fine. It doesn't mean we have to agree with it….
>
> **Tim:** If there are some people of a certain race or something that would dig to like you know to analyze it to see if you're making fun of certain people, [then] they've got to watch it more open-mindedly.

Here again we see concern over racism dismissed as an issue of individuals being overly sensitive rather than a justified reaction to systematic oppression. The result of this Patio Furniture believes is that he is excluded from some forms of humour because of what he sees as reverse racism.

> **Tim:** I've never, I've never really heard anything against stereotypes. I guess because I'm a middle-class white male. I'm the most majority I guess.
>
> **Patio Furniture:** It's weird because I haven't felt any direct racism against me or anything. But I have felt… reverse racism. I'm not allowed to do anything. Anything, anything that could be possibly construed as racist I'm not allowed to do. A friend of mine, he's Asian, or, not Asian. He's Indian and he was Hitler for Halloween. I could not have gotten away with that.

The participants' relationship to gender and race is complex. Tim is acknowledging that he has not experienced being stereotyped; however, Patio Furniture believes he has been impacted by reverse racism. Interestingly, as white boys they felt they could make videos that humorously make use of stereotypes but that they could not do serious videos on racism because they are white.

Example #6—Subjectivities and mediatized sexism: slut versus the intersection of the Playboy bunny and Civil Rights

Media Spoof includes two scenes involving prostitutes. In the first there is the "skeazy prostitute" who sells drugs.

> **Patio Furniture:** [laughs] We hid the prostitute bit from most people until we were kind of done so it was just left in there.
>
> **Tim**: We have two prostitutes in there. [laughter] Well the one where she comes out of the car with her [Dad].
>
> **Patio Furniture:** I think it, like after seeing it again and again now, I wouldn't take it out. It's valuable. [laughter] Plus it's hilarious.

Patio Furniture expressed concern some people might be offended because they don't get the pop culture references and so think the video is violent or sexist. The reasons the producers give for including scenes of prostitutes are different. Patio Furniture thinks the video is effective but also hilarious. Tim states prostitutes might be offended but girls would like it. The scene can be interpreted in many ways. It can be seen as an attempt to challenge notions of girls as ditzy and "loose" or it can be interpreted as a morality play on girls who are "loose", such as sex trade workers. The issue for the producers is not who gets to decide which girls are moral or not but to challenge adult panic about "loose" girls.

On the other hand, the *Media Spoof* producers reflect on the differences in what girl and boy producers can do. Jennifer, the interviewer, asked the boys what their thoughts were about a video done by two girls in their class about depression. In the video one of the girls has a backpack with the Playboy Bunny on it.

> **Megatron:** You definitely have to be more careful if you're trying to make a video that's trying to go against stereotypes like the stuff like that, especially if it's like girls. Don't be walking around with a Playboy bunny on your back.

Patio Furniture and Tim agree the Playboy bunny could lead to assumptions about a girl she might not want. In the following quote Oxpig continues to focus on morality but includes a critique of capitalism as the cause.

> … personally I think the Playboy bunny is terrible. You see girls wearing it and it's just so stupid. But it's like, you could argue it's the media's responsibility to, to be socially conscious and to be pushing these good morals, but you never see it because everyone's so capitalist.

Here Oxpig puts the decision of girls to wear the playboy bunny into the frame of stupidity and morals. What is interesting is that he describes what an effective video is based on the consumption of popular culture, but he sees his consumption as more reflective than that of a girl wearing a shirt with a Playboy Bunny.

Jennifer asked the producer of the video, Billy-Jo Bob, about her decisions to let her actress—Bob-the-Builder—wear the Playboy Bunny.

> **Billy-Jo Bob (BJB)**: I mean, it's a very interesting looking picture [the playboy bunny image]. It's a work of art. It's not telling people to go have sex with forty-year-old men when they're 14.
>
> **Interviewer:** Do you think media has a responsibility not to offend?

> **Billy-Jo Bob:** Well you know, offending, like, yeah. If blacks hadn't stood up for their rights and offended the white people, they wouldn't have gotten their rights. So maybe we need to offend certain people to get change.

For BJB there is an intersection of the individual consumer choice to wear the Playboy bunny with civil rights. Significantly BJB also locates her decision within a framework of morals and sexuality. At first, I was surprised that BJB would equate the Playboy Bunny with civil rights but it is important to see BJB's explanation in the context of the commercialization of human rights. For example, in reviewing some pictures of a trip I took to the Apartheid Museum in South Africa I came across a picture I took of a coke machine that had a quote from Nelson Mandela about human rights. I turned on my television last week and saw an ad for Tampax in which a girl from an African village is now joyfully going to school and has a chance at life because she need not skip school during her period - thanks to Tampax she's protected. These examples do not mean that BJB has just blindly imitated popular culture but that she attempts to use it as part of developing her identity as an insider in some circles and an outsider in others.

The construction and constraints of mediatized subjectivities: voice versus influence

During my project, girls and minorities repeatedly told heartfelt stories of marginalization and the effects this has on them. Often participants spoke of the media education process as helping them see how they were represented in media and how they could change representations through their own productions. The projects were therefore successful on this important level, but where I fell short in the design of the project was looking more clearly at the process in more multidimensional ways in which mediatization of subjectivities construct what is sayable, by whom and how. I encouraged participants to explore topics of interest to them, to play with different genres and registers but I did not take into account the process of not just school hierarchy but subjectivities developed through years of media engagement. The study points to the need to look at communication as multi-level.

Media education requires looking at interpersonal relationships and mediatized subjectivities as interconnected. The choices youth make in membership groupings for the video process, topics and genre are enmeshed in the mediatization of all spaces including schools.

The participants in my study are not naive or narcissistic dupes. They understood the context in which they operated and what they needed to do to maintain a sense of self. Their desire to "fit in" or to rebel against pressure to fit in is not a matter of false consciousness. For the girls and racialized minorities there were real constraints on them. The boys too were constrained in what they could say in the school environment but also in what they thought sayable and not for them. For example they felt they could make fun of racism, but they could not make a serious video about racism because they were not minorities.

The process of "empowerment" and "voice" can result in masking how power relations play a significant role in shaping individuals' sense of self and collective identity "through acts that distinguish and treat a person as gendered, raced, classed, or other sort of subject" (Holland and Leander 2004: 127). What would a critical media education that encompasses strategies for working towards more equitable schools and communities look like? First, it would analyze and give room to challenge the psychologization of systemic problems. This can result in a mediatized charity model in which "minorities" or "troubled" youth are granted a mediatized catharsis or voice but no influence to change structures of inequity. Second, educators, like students, are constituted and constitutive of media. More focus is needed, particularly in teacher education, to examine how adults come to understand their own mediatized subjectitvies and the way this affects how they interact with youth in a media education context.

Media Education can be a playful place for reflecting on identities and media, but if we want to provoke pupils, we need to ask ourselves both to what ends and what means would lead to these ends. Youth are hierarchically structured, as are adults. Similar to the *Media Spoof*, popular media shows simultaneously challenge and maintain hegemonic masculinity and whiteness as a legitimate subjectivity. For example, John Stewart may make fun of overtly patriarchal policies while sending a message that men are the best sources of information by having predominantly white male guests and staff on his show. Men are more often seen as society's storytellers whether as sources for "real" news, as investigative journalists or as satirists. Media education is an important location to examine who gets to say what and why.

Media is not just one element of many. Our understanding of knowledge and reality, ourselves and others is mediatized. Paradoxically, media engagement is central to entrenching and challenging historically dominant definers of social, economic and political life. As I pointed out in the beginning of this article, mediatization is a dual process (Hjarvard 2008: 105). Media is part of political, economic and social institutions and these institutions are part of media. In popular debates about the dangers of media on the minds of young people, absent is the discussion the *Media Spoof* producers portrayed so clearly - media is not a demonic force that pushes young people to temptation and provides factual and serious accounts of world events to adults. Media is our everyday, therefore, media education ought to be seen as an experience as odd as asking a fish to describe water. It is, however, a process of describing, constructing and reconstructing that is central to challenging systemic injustice and facilitating opportunities for different subjectivities.

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Book Notice

Zinn, Howard, Mike Konopacki, and Paul Buhle. 2008. *A People's History of American Empire: A Graphic Adaptation*. New York: Metropolitan Books. 273 pp. ISBN-10 0-8050-8744-3.

What happened to the American Indians at Wounded Knee? What was the reason for the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba? What caused the Vietnam war? What was behind the Iran-Contras affair? When and why did the war against terrorism in the U.S. really begin? The answers to these and many other key historical questions can be found illustrated and explained in a very accessible way in this new graphic book, which has been published by an alternative debate forum—The American Empire Project—in the United States.

The author is the famous radical American history professor and peace activist, Howard Zinn, who died this year at the age of 87. Zinn is best remembered for his comprehensive account, *A People's History of the United States,* first published in 1980 and continually updated. It is a book that has taught millions of Americans and others about the alternative tradition of popular activism and resistance in the United States, something that is often hidden by more conventional history books. Zinn's book has sold over two million copies and is almost unique in the publishing world for continuously selling more copies each year than it did the year before.

This new graphic adaptation, dramatically illustrated by Mike Konopacki depicting the development of the American empire, can be seen as a radical response to the debate since 9/11 about the role the United States has adopted of policing the world in an endless war against terrorism. In a much more visual way than in his classic people's history, Zinn seeks to reach out to new categories of readers who are perhaps not aware of the much longer and violent history of the American empire in this context: from the colonial genocide of native Americans to repeated neocolonial military interventions in countries such as the Philipines, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Panama and Guatemala. At the same time, since this is a people's history, Zinn wants to shift the focus back to all the thousands of ordinary people who were directly affected by this aggressive American policy of expansionism—both as forgotten victims, but also as active resistance fighters. The basic conclusion of Zinn's historical account, however, is that it does pay to protest. Thus, Zinn draws a parallel between support for the liberation movement in Vietnam to today's anti-war protesters. This new album utilises in a powerful way modern graphic book techniques to depict a radically different view of American politics. Compared to most other histories of the United States, this graphic account is a popular cultural alternative that is visually engaging, critically thought-provoking and politically inspiring.

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