



*Popular  
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# From the Editor



Editing *Popular Culture Review* for the last 27 years has been a labor of love. I would like to acknowledge the support of UNLV's College of Liberal Arts and Department of English as well as PCA/ACA and, most recently Policy Studies Organization.

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# Introduction

In this second volume of our lucky 13th issue, *Popular Culture Review* brings its readership article topics gleaned, as usual, from a wide range of mediums — television, radio, film, the written word, and the world of cyberspace. Within these pages we meet up with Sherlock Holmes, Walt Whitman, Gen X'ers (aka “Bridgers”), celebrated radio talk show and television news hosts, Audrey™ the on-line family organizer, and several memoir writers. We also re-visit that popular monster-thrashing Buffy the Vampire and the cinematic theorist André Bazin whose film reviews were translated in volume 13, no. 1. Interestingly, this issue seems relatively “light,” politically speaking, with the most serious articles addressing the various spins taken by policy elites on the Oklahoma City bombing; the contrast in reactions to underage drinking and violence in our high schools among “Boomers” and “Bridgers”; and differing views on the dying process from three male writers suffering from AIDS. In keeping with the overall tone of the issue, we open with Laura DeLind's amusing warning that Americans just might be “slowly boiling ourselves alive” with an ever-quickening pace and unhealthy over-dependence on the technological. Reading her terse diatribe, “Beware: Breakfast with Audrey™ Is Not Dinner with André,” I looked fondly at the eclectic “energy” of my own “family news center” — the refrigerator — with its haphazardly-positioned notices, photos, amateur artwork, and cluttered calendar. Hopefully DeLind's article will remind readers to embrace the “spirit and contradiction” that is diversely created on refrigerator doors across the country and to stop and take more than a moment to savor our wonderfully human dis-order.

The included selections in the medium of radio are informative and inspiring. In “Sherlock Holmes Meets Art Bell: Masters of Knowledge at the Fin-de-Siècle,” Steve Bailey juxtaposes two unique seekers of “truth”: the fictional detective of the 19th century, Sherlock Holmes, and an am radio personality Art Bell, whose show is broadcast from here in the Southern Nevada desert. Bailey moves back and forth between Holmes' (and consequently, Doyle's) modernist rationality and Bell's postmodern irrationality, ultimately turning both labels on their highfalutin' heads. In “‘I Feel Powerful’: African-American Community Radio in Dallas, Texas,” J.M. Dempsey and Meta G. Carstarphen provide a laudable portrait of another am radio personality, the Dallas-Fort Worth area morning host Willis Johnson. Johnson claims that the purpose of his show “...is to serve the Black community, 100% the Black community.” Dempsey and Carstarphen studied approximately 14 hours of recordings of the radio station and applied concepts from the social learning theory of behaviorist Albert Bandura to explore how positive behaviors are amplified by association with radio listening. As the authors note, while many studies have

linked negative behavior to radio (such as the theory that adolescents can learn violent behavior from listening to certain songs), little has been done to study the medium's influence on altruism and communal good will.

Asbjoern Groenstad provides our only article from the cinema world with his study of the changes in the meaning of "filmicity" wrought by the recent incorporation of CGI into the medium. "Back to Bazin? Filmicity in the Age of the Digital Image" argues for the preservation of "the filmic" as promoted by Bazin. Perhaps I should have included Groenstad's article among the "heavies" as it is thick with theory, but the diligent reader is sure to gain a broader understanding of cinema in the 21st century. Hopefully, Groenstad's ideas will initiate further discussions of "postphotography." From the ubiquitous realm of television, we bring readers an array of commentary from "reality tv." In "The Oklahoma City Bombing and Policy Agendas in the Media," Ballard, Brents, and Dean chart the influence of diverse groups of state representatives on public policy through a review of television interviews broadcast after the bombing. They draw from several political and social theorists in their study of power moves in times of crisis and invite us all to look closely at the "experts" from strategically positioned state and national agencies who dominate our newscasts. Randyll Yoder analyzes public access television producers by applying folklore and storytelling characteristics to them. Yoder divides his interviewees into three categories — ego promoters, message/issue practitioners, and story/entertainment producers — and uncovers a microcosm highlighted by common traditions, personal interests and motivations, and a limited concern with audience needs and expectations. In another "reality television" article, Fran Pelham, a literature and communications professor, discusses the results of a student assignment in comparing works of literature to one of the popular reality tv shows that are dominating evening television these days. In addition to the comparison, she has the students superimpose Freytag's Triangle onto the television shows they pick. Her goal is to encourage students to "generate new texts", à la Robert Scholes, in an effort to make the study of literary canons more relevant to today's students.

Our final article on reality television, Tom Mascaro's "Crossing Over: How Celebrity Newsmagazines Pushed Entertainment Shows Out of Prime Time," traces the emerging popularity of the newly-invented format of the news show in the 1980's. Mascaro provides an informative history of primetime "infotainment," from early documentaries such as "Scared Sexless" and "Life in the Fat Lane," through the 1990's creation of newsmagazines like "Real Life with Jane Pauley" and "Exposé". Reality TV has become such a common term these days — with night classes often ending early in order to catch the final round of Survivor or Survivor Down Under, or Survivor on the Moon... — that further discussions of what is "real" television and why many are so attracted to it are encouraged.

Martin Buinicki and Anthony Enns bring us back to the basic purpose of television (the re-enforcement of governmental and cultural dictates on acceptable social behavior, of course) with “Buffy the Vampire Disciplinarian: Institutional Excess, Spiritual Technologies, and the New Economy of Power.” In the article Buinicki and Enns question recent claims by scholars that the show provides a subversive critique of our cultural institutions of power. Adopting the Foucauldian model of punishment and discipline, the authors view Buffy and her cohort in the spin-off series *Angel* as incorporating traditional power relations and methods of surveillance in their escapades. (It sounds a lot heavier than it really is, but we all know what convoluted havoc Foucault can wreak on any analysis!)

Gregory Fowler presents a serious, yet disparaging (for Boomers) comparison of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers, whom he prefers to call “Bridgers,” in “Stone Throwing in Glass Houses: When Baby Boomers Met Generation X.” After a sobering discussion of the ways in which representatives from each generation reacted to the shootings in the Columbine and Paducah high schools, Fowler outlines the “Bridger” mindset as he sees it —one that questions American “core beliefs” such as religion, political institutions and familial structures. Fowler holds nothing back in his detailing of the wrongs Boomers (aka “the giant collective Boomer ego”) have imposed upon their progeny, the “Xers.” Comments, Boomers?

In “AIDS Memoirs and Two Theoretical Approaches to the Dying Process,” Dennis Russell applies two theories on dying to the autobiographical works of writers Paul Monette (*Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*), Mark Matousek (*Sex Death Enlightenment*), and anthropologist Eric Michaels (*Unbecoming*). Both Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ five stages of death and Charles A. Corr’s “task-based approach” to coping with death prove applicable to these intellectuals’ experience with AIDS. While Kubler-Ross separates coping with death into five stages – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance – Russell notes that Corr’s approach deals with the dying person in a “holistic manner,” avoiding generalizations and acknowledging individual experiences. The article invites readers to explore a – sadly – growing body of creative work that is both important and unsettling. AIDS memoirs expand the dimensions of autobiographical writing, both personally and politically.

Matthew Kapell’s article, “*Civilization* and its Discontents; American Monomythic Structure as Historical Simulacrum” gives us a glimpse of another ever-expanding avenue in popular culture today — the world of the computer simulation game. Kapell presents the computer games *Civilization*, versions I through III, in relation to “American monomythic ideals” as put forth by Frederick Jackson Turner at the end of the nineteenth century. He claims that the myths of progress through expansion and conquest are still important today, as witnessed by the popularity of these games, and aligns the dominant “American mythopoetic

structure” as Turner popularized it with the tactics and goals of the computer games. Aren’t there any computer games out there that deconstruct these overdone “mythopoetic tropes” and envision something more all-embracing?

Finally, Jason Stacy’s paper “Containing Multitudes: Whitman, The Working Class, and the Music of Moderate Reform” analyzes Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* and its 1855 edition Introduction to explore the poet’s complex and ambiguous ideas regarding working-class reforms. Stacey includes an historical summary of both the radical and conservative debates centering around the issue in his detailing of Whitman’s “symphonic vision. ”

Readers may notice that I’ve been hinting at a more interactive approach to our intimate journal in this issue. The editorial staff has had the brilliant idea of opening up our world to yet more opinions. So many of us don’t have the time (or the Audrey™...) to create an entire article for publication, but why not our own Letters to the Pop Culture Audience? Sends us your thoughts, your musings, your tirades on our articles (and “our” Introduction...) and in the next issue we will incorporate yet another aspect of Popular Culture – The Responses. Once again, PCR promises to tempt and torment, amuse and rile, but mostly, to inspire, its eclectic audience. Read on!

Juli Barry, Ph.D.  
Associate Editor  
Popular Culture Review

## **Beware: Breakfast with Audrey™ Is Not Dinner with André**

There is a parable about a frog who allows him (or her) self to be boiled alive. Put into a pot of cool water he doesn't notice when the temperature increases slowly one degree at a time. Finally, when the frog does notice that his life has become unbearable, it's too late; he's as good as dead and dinner. When he could have jumped and saved himself, he wasn't uncomfortable enough; when he was, he couldn't.

We humans are hardly immune to this same incremental self-destruction. In the short term we readily accept whatever it is that keeps us comfortable (or promises comfort). In the long term we compromise our ability to take action on our own behalf. We have only to look at such things as urban sprawl, global warming or fast food to know that this is true. Getting through the day is what concerns us most — what we eat, where we live, where we work and how we get from here to there are decisions that condition the next day's slightly more agitated and slightly more constrained choices. We, especially those of us who live in the industrial and materially privileged North, literally work ourselves into a snarl, proudly and apologetically declaring “I really don't have the time” and “I know it's not what I should be doing, but...”

Still, as self-conscious creatures we also have the ability to understand much of what is going on within us and around us. We may be overwhelmed by the global, but we can, if we look about, find lessons in the familiar and the local. Familiar images have great power. They can, on the one hand, keep us from jumping out of the pot, from questioning small changes and seeing large ones. On the other hand, they can, when placed a degree or two off-center, startle us and cause us to reflect on the choices we have made and the hot water lapping at our flanks. In other words, the familiar can insulate us from ourselves and the world we inhabit, but it also can provide us with some rather essential insights into the way we live our lives. This was the case with a set of images I recently found in the form of a two-page magazine advertisement.

On the first of two facing pages was a colorful picture of a refrigerator framed by kitchen clutter. On its doors was the usual assortment of family paper, whimsy and memorabilia. Refrigerator magnets in the shape of animals, insects, letters, fruit, heavenly bodies, and breakfast foods held up announcements, party invitations, children's art work, photographs, recipes, business cards, practice schedules, shopping lists and calendars. It was a familiar scene, one that still plays well in

kitchens across the country. Here an exuberant and haphazard collage of bits and pieces masqueraded as a message center and the visual pulse of daily life.

The second page provided a stark contrast. The page itself was predominantly white and, with the exception of a compact plastic device and a bit of black text, quite empty. Below the device (which based on its shape and graphic monitor might have recorded blood pressure or radon levels) was written "Audrey™, anyone?" At the bottom of the page was written "Is this what your refrigerator looks like? Thought so. That's why we invented Audrey. Audrey™ is an online family organizer, with a date book, address book and calendar. You get a new way to access pre-selected sites on the Internet with the turn of a dial. Plus e-mail you can send by scribbling, talking or typing." The stinger was the company logo: "Simple sets you free."

The message was clear: the era of chaotic refrigerator communication was over. There was no longer any need to live with, or to tolerate such a random and physically cumbersome system. Now one, decidedly female, hand-held, electronic instrument would introduce efficiency and order into all corners of family life.

I was simultaneously fascinated and flabbergasted. As I sat pondering the message and its assumptions several questions sprung to mind. What is the matter with a decorated refrigerator that it should inspire such an austere and expensive (i.e., \$499.00) technological fix? And why are we so dedicated to order, especially order for order sake?

The refrigerator, it would appear, is an assault on our senses. Not only is it messy, but "essential" information must compete with a riot of color, a hodge-podge of shapes and quirky personal presentations. Audrey™ will remove the distractions, she will isolate the messages, and she will organize them in a functionally efficient manner. Every family member wherever they may be will now know that the dog has not been fed, that there are three suits at the cleaners, and that Grandma will be serving dinner at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. Regardless of whether they knew such things before, they will now know them by interacting with Audrey™ and not with each other.

Unlike the advertisers, I find something wrong with this picture. In the first place, it privileges "facts" over context. A note on a napkin, an address on a match book cover, or a recipe on a sweat sock are irrelevant (and invisible) to Audrey™. So are the personalities and the relationships of those who produced them. There is nothing particular or singularly expressive in her management of information. She selects for the quantifiable and not for the humorous, the aesthetic or the interpretive. The latter are not germane to an ordered life.

In the second place, Audrey™ "disappears" one of the few remaining free or "wild" spaces in our domestic lives. While a decorated refrigerator is hardly equivalent to an old-growth forest, a mountain range, or a school of salmon, it is,

in its own small way, a place that is awesome and spontaneous. There is energy there; there are layers of memory; there is a physical engagement; there is much redundancy, and endless opportunity to clash with the wallpaper. Refrigerators turned billboards are both common as mud and inspired. They are full of spirit and contradiction. They do not cater to straight rows, to segregated species, or to measured inputs. They are not, as Audrey™ well knows, simple.

Third, Audrey™ approaches family affairs as a mechanical task. She is regularizing family relationships which are, by their very nature, dense, emotion-filled, and inefficient. It is within this matrix of affective and difficult relationships that we become human — visible and knowable. Audrey™ does not know us, nor does she assist us in knowing ourselves better. She caters to “busy lives,” and to all the singular demands that pull us away from a nurturing center. It is hardly surprising that the refrigerator as a symbol of stored and shared nourishment is found wanting. In truth, fewer families eat together and fewer family members come home to eat at all. In a world where scientists must tell us that children who eat meals at home receive better nutrition, Audrey™ becomes the tie that binds. She reminds us of our obligations, she mediates our conversations, and conditions our interactions and expectations. This is frightening.

And yet, Audrey™ is essentially no different from dozens of innovations we have embraced over the past few decades to help us micro-manage our lives and move us through our paces. We have accepted dishwashers, microwaves, programmable coffee makers and smart cars. We are tethered to answering machines, pagers, cell phones, and, of course, the Internet. As these global connections deepen, time and space compress and eventually collapse. We, who are still organic creatures, no longer permit ourselves “down time;” we override biological rests and individual silences. We are “on call” 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Furthermore, everything, in the best of all possible worlds, can be done at once and everything is equally essential. We are now competitively and compulsively multi-tasking — driving our cars, while eating our breakfasts, while combing our hair, while conducting business and checking in with Audrey™. We also are increasingly fearful that we will be replaced and/or left behind. A fear that, ironically, is based in considerable truth. As we grow more mechanically discrete and expertly detached, we also grow more interchangeable and replaceable. We are streamlining ourselves out of existence.

In addition, any mistakes we make in this brittle, precariously balanced system are magnified. Like dominoes, one snow storm, one car accident, one illness, one missed meeting or payment sets off a chain of events that threatens major disruption. This, as Dilbert tells us, is not efficiency; neither is it freedom. It is being boiled alive one degree at a time.

Like a mirror, we have shattered into many sharp and jagged selves in an

effort to “keep up” and to “buy time.” But, we never seem to manage to do either. Each new “convenience” commits us to additional monthly bills, extra maintenance and equipment, a steep learning curve, and a slightly altered way of behaving. On average, we work more now than we did 25 years ago and we are in far greater debt. We are bent under the weight of our possessions and ruled by our own technologies.

And still, propelled along by our growing dependence and vulnerability we search for ways to “fix” our lives. But this assumes that there is such a thing as “a fix” and that life itself is something that needs fixing. These are certainly debatable assumptions. Less debatable is the object of our search. Basically, we want the same things now that we have always wanted — to have the time to care for and enjoy our children, our neighbors and our friends and to be well cared for in return. We want to be secure, to be stimulated, and to have leisure time sufficient to marvel at the seasons and watch the clouds float by. Simply put, we want to belong, to be known, and to actively connect with a living earth.

And here is the ultimate irony. We are sacrificing the very things that mean so much to us. We have lost sight of them as anything other than an inconvenience. When a refrigerator turned family scrap book and bulletin board becomes an impediment to the daily routine, it is time to reexamine our daily routine, our relationships, our priorities, and our lives. It is not time to buy another piece of organizational hardware. It is time to jump out of the pot.

A decorated refrigerator is hardly an elegant image. But therein lies its power. It can be easily appropriated by ordinary human beings and used as metaphor. Metaphors are wonderful things. They fire our imaginations. They provide us with a shorthand to sort through vast sets of meanings and relationships. They are analogies that move across seemingly endless and unrelated contexts. They are creative abstractions that help us visualize reality and shape it in return.

A decorated refrigerator flapping with colorful messages and odd bits of personal history is just such a metaphor. It holds open a vital space at the center of our lives — a space that is familiar, accessible and accepting, where the medium is often the message, where neatness doesn’t count for much, and where magic and memory do. It is a place for people, a place at once too alive and too complex for Audrey<sup>TM</sup>. This is fine with me. She’s not someone I’d want to eat breakfast with anyway.

# Back to Bazin? Filmicity in the Age of the Digital Image

*When you see a photograph of yourself, do you say you're a fiction?*

Jean-Luc Godard

In a 1999 article for *Sight and Sound*, Peter Matthews ponders the current state of film theory, making the following concession: “in so far as a compulsive skepticism and a jaded cynicism have become the orthodoxies of our age, this may be the moment to start rehabilitating reality – and André Bazin” (25).

While my aim here is not to do exactly that, I will in this paper address a set of issues involving perhaps not so much the relationship between film and what one somewhat equivocally calls realism as the representational opposition between photographic and digital film imagery. In an experiential, phenomenological sense, the film image is devoid of any material substance; it is but the chemical reflection of a space that belongs to the past, a ghostly apparition impossibly claimed both by the fictional and the real.<sup>1</sup> One may wish to maintain that in a literal sense, the substance of the image must be its material base. However true that is, in our everyday encounters with film what we interact with is not the tangible celluloid but the non-material shapes and colors projected from it. Regardless of how extensively any given film is edited, the fact remains that if we are to speak of the phenomenal (as opposed to the material) image as constitutive of a particular substance, it must be the textualized derivative of the profilmic event itself. Etymologically, the meaning of the word ‘substance’ shares an affinity with the concept of ontology. Whereas in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* ‘substance’ is codified as “the real physical matter of which a person or thing consists, and which has a tangible, solid presence,” the meaning of the Latin *substantia* is ‘being’ or ‘essence.’ The former stresses the material aspect, the latter the philosophical. In his book *Sculpting in Time*, Andrey Tarkovsky revealingly pinpoints the substance of the filmic thus:

Cinema uses the materials given by nature itself, by the passage of time, manifested within space, that we observe about us and in which we live. Some image of the world arises in the writer’s consciousness which he then, by means of words, writes down on paper. But the roll of film imprints mechanically the features of the unconditional world which come into the camera’s field of vision, and from these an image of the whole is subsequently constructed (177).<sup>2</sup>

It is with this understanding of substance as essence that my discussion will proceed.

The central questions informing the remainder of this paper are twofold. First, what is filmicity in the era of digitalization and computer-generated imagery? Second, in what ways does the introduction of digital images alter the essential nature and teleology of cinema as comprehended by a theoretical tradition one might refer to as Bazinianism. Underlying these questions is the assumption that a cinema which readily incorporates non-photographic material necessitates a redefinition of the substantial core of the notion of filmicity.

As of yet, the transformation from a photographically-based to a partly computer-based film technology is perhaps most easily evidenced in certain strata of American filmmaking. Texts like *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg 1993), *Titanic* (James Cameron 1997), *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir 1998), *The Matrix* (Andy & Larry Wachowski 1999) and *The Beach* (Danny Boyle 2000) putatively exhibit a double manipulation; a film textuality twice removed from the arena of the real. What I want to focus on in this respect is not so much the vagaries of referentiality that these differing representational practices entail, but rather the documentary dimension inherent in the photographic-cinematographic process. That is, there is a quality in the photograph which exceeds – and possibly also supersedes – that of narrativity, of ‘realism,’ and even of representation in the Aristotelian sense.<sup>3</sup> I choose to name this seemingly ineffable aspect a *dialectics of presence*.

Let us say we are watching a fiction film, Fellini’s *La Strada* (1954), for instance. The world inhabited by the main protagonists Gelsomina and Zampanò constitutes the film’s diegesis, the sphere of the fictional. On the level of signification, the structure of the mise-en-scene as well as the performances given by actors Giulietta Masina and Anthony Quinn mark the act of mimesis (the technical facilitation of the creation of the fiction). Nevertheless, however profoundly the audience and the actors alike immerse themselves in the represented fiction, the mimetic process cannot in manifesting itself at the same time erase the pre-fictional embodiment upon which it rests.<sup>4</sup> As spectators, we do not see Gelsomina unless we see Masina first, or at least simultaneously. The space of the character does not completely exhaust the space of the actor Masina, who is an actual person captured by cinematographer Otello Martelli’s camera while portraying the fictional protagonist Gelsomina. Though the observation in itself might sound trivial, it has vast implications for our conceptualization of the nature of the film image. With Godard we might ask: when we see the photographed Masina, do we say she is a fiction? As opposed to the computer-generated image, the photographic has a profilmic substance palpable in the subsistence of an extra-fictional *trace*.<sup>5</sup> It is this feature that more than anything else defines the essence of filmicity. Narrative, spectacle, representation are all important functions of the medium of film, but

they do not represent qualities unique to it. On the assumption that the possession of qualitative specificity is crucial in determining the ontology of a given object or phenomenon,<sup>6</sup> one may therefore conclude that the Bazinian theory of the photographic image – unfashionable as it may seem<sup>7</sup> – can still contribute productive insights into the nature of cinema, in the era of computerization perhaps more than ever.<sup>8</sup>

If, as Bazin has argued, the photographic image works to embalm selected fragments of a profilmic existence, then one could make the claim that the presence of a certain lived reality imprints upon the image its own solid substance in the form of what Gilles Deleuze terms a *mnemosign*. The external referent acquires a kind of secondary presence which enables it to transcend and outlive its own impermanence. As Dudley Andrew has remarked, “We accept or even venerate these [photographs] not because they look like the originals, but because their origin stems from direct contact with the objects they call up” (In Lehman 78). With the prevalence of digitized film imagery, this relation between origin and its trace collapses, and results in images without referents.<sup>9</sup> Hence, what needs to be resolved is the substantial status of this new computerized image, with respect to both ontology on the one hand, and aesthetic and ethical implications on the other.

What is at stake, then, in the passage from photography to computer animation is the conservational value of film; the photograph as a record not of the ‘real’ but of a certain presence located at the interstice between fiction and reality. For Bazin, the principal purpose of the filmic is commemorative. He writes that “no one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death” (10). In effect, such an emphasis on the mnemonic function of photography suggests that, teleologically, film is fundamentally concerned with what one could call an ethics of mourning. As Matthews has pointed out, Bazin champions this view with an unflinching moral urgency. According to Bazin, Matthews says, film has a special obligation “to document the world before attempting to interpret or criticize it” (23). It appears that what Bazin intends with his reflections on the ethical basis of filmic preservation is nothing less than to divest memory of its subjective nesting. If not for the invention of photography, his argument goes, this would of course have been impossible (many would indubitably still maintain that this is so). In what is arguably one of the seminal passages in the history of film theory, Bazin consolidates his deliberation:

The aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities. It is not for me to separate off, in the complex fabric of the objective world, here a reflection on a damp sidewalk, there the gesture of a child. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all

those ways of seeing it,<sup>10</sup> those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love (15).

With reference to the idea of preservation in which this assertion is lodged, one might argue that Bazin mobilizes the concept of celluloid memory as a superior, and more ethical alternative to subjective memory, steeped as the latter is in the cosmetic modifications of our individual recollections. For a vivid enactment of the principle at the core of Bazin's commemorative theory, consider this lengthy excerpt from Don DeLillo's *Americana* (1971):

I took the camera from my lap, raised it to my eye, leaned out the window a bit, and trained it on the ladies as if I were shooting. One of them saw me and immediately nudged her companion but without taking her eyes off the camera. They waved. One by one the others reacted. They all smiled and waved. They seemed supremely happy. Maybe they sensed that they were waving at themselves, waving in the hope that someday if evidence is demanded of their passage through time, demanded by their own doubts, a moment might be recalled when they stood in a dazzling plaza in the sun and were registered on the transparent plastic ribbon; and thirty years away, on that day when proof is needed, it could be hoped that their film is being projected on a screen somewhere, and there they stand, verified, in chemical reincarnation, waving at their own old age, smiling their reassurance to the decades, a race of eternal pilgrims in a marketplace in the dusty sunlight, seven arms extended in a fabulous salute and to the forgetfulness of being. What better proof (if proof is ever needed) that they have truly been alive? Their happiness, I think, was made of this, the anticipation of incontestable evidence, and had nothing to do with the present moment, which would pass with all the others into whatever is the opposite of eternity" (254).

The characters in DeLillo's novel, as the narrator makes clear, seem to derive their sense of rapture from their (mistaken) belief that they are being captured on film or, to use Laura Mulvey's phrase, "fossilized on celluloid" (24). If the photographic image can be said to have a substance, a body, it is precisely this engraving of fossiliferous signs which verify memory in "chemical reincarnation."

Though Bazin's thesis has always invited opposition, it has become particularly shaky in the current climate where, as Matthews contends, "the digitization of the image threatens to cut the umbilical cord between photograph and referent on which

Bazin founded his entire theory” (25). Alexandre Astruc seems to have anticipated such a development long ago. “The cinema,” he opined, “is not an eternal art. Its forms are not unchanging. Each of the aspects that it reveals is *linked inevitably to the psychology of a period*” (emphasis added, quoted in Bordwell 46). Keeping in mind Astruc’s postulation, it is possible to conceive of the transition in film from documentation to simulation as a process parallel to that of refashioning the human body through cosmetic surgery. In many ways, the manipulation of the image by digitization is similar to the manipulation of the body by the scalpel. Both operations are symptomatic of the emergence of an increasingly prosthetic culture. Intriguingly, filmic and corporeal surgery no less than photography aim to resist processes of decay. As Bazin submits, the latter “does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption” (14). Paradoxically, however, where the photograph prevents corruption by preserving the object, surgery attempts to do the same by transforming it. Inevitably, this engenders yet another contradiction, since surgical alteration is often a conservational procedure which curtails the continuity of that sameness it attempts to insulate from the corruption of time. As computer surgery modifies the substance of the body of the photographic image, film becomes not the redemption but the negation of physical reality.

In assuming what one might call a Neo-Bazinian position vis-à-vis cinema and the photographic, I am acutely aware of the risk of embracing a thesis that in theoretical terms appears reactionary, or at least antiquated. The disputant will no doubt ask why I worry so much about the material basis of representational forms, thinking this inconsequential in relation to the effects and messages fictional representations are bound to convey irrespective of the nature of their materiality. Moreover, she may add that phenomenology overrides ontology;<sup>11</sup> that is, what does it matter that the stunning image of the chateau by the lake and the Swiss Alps in James Cameron’s *True Lies* (1994) is devoid of photographic referentiality as long as viewers approach it as a reproduction of actual space? Pictorial verisimilitude, one may continue, has not so much to do with the substance of its source as with the machinations of visual perception. When Stephen Prince in a 1996 article in *Film Quarterly* probed the consequences of the following question - “What are the implications of computer-generated imagery for representation in cinema, particularly for concepts of photographically based realism?” (27) – he concluded that *perceptual realism* “can encompass both unreal images and those which are referentially fictional but perceptually realistic” (32). He thus suggests that the effects of perceptual realism supersede the problem of material realism.

Even if most viewers would fail to make a phenomenological distinction between photographic and computer-generated imagery, one may still identify a set of problems related to postphotographic practice and the status of the filmic. Firstly, *film is not a mere receptacle* for a kind of extra-filmic content we call

message, narrative, or meaning. The uniqueness of the medium – and hence its teleology and justification – depends on its form and substance, and not on its subject matter or effects. Whereas the latter properties are characteristics of all art-and media forms, the former involve cinema specifically and exclusively. Overtly commonsensical as it may seem, it is the quality of material differentiation which facilitates the broad array of artistic media that we have. Put simply, what makes for instance *Citizen Kane* a movie is not that it tells the story of the rise and fall of its main protagonist, but that it moulds such a story into a cinematic form and substance. What I am trying to suggest here is that the notion of filmicity is not a means, a vehicle for the object of the audience's desire (putatively the story); rather it is the end of our desire itself. Cinephilia, then, is more than the designation given to the so-called film buffs; it is the precondition for our transactions with film in the first place. When, due to the effect of perceptual realism, we mistake the *simulation* of film for film, we similarly and inadvertently simulate our desire for the filmic. With regard to the question of realism, one might maintain that the audience here is twice duped. Not only is the world on the screen — which the viewer processes as perceptually “real” — not constituted by the particles of actual reality, it is not even composed of chemicals and light but of a chain of computerized algorithms. For the audience, this situation no longer involves perceptual realism in relation to cinema, but a kind of hyperrealism (in Baudrillard's sense) in relation to what for a lack of a better term could be referred to as post-cinema.

The argument above, which is based on the significance of qualitative differences between photographic and digitalized images, might seem vulnerable to charges of tautology (“digital imagery is not classifiable as film because it is not filmic”). If so, this is a serious misapprehension. In any examination of the definitional status of a given substance, the identification of necessary and sufficient conditions represents a legitimate foundation for establishing qualitative differences between two phenomena. The substance of digital imagery is clearly sufficiently different from that of photographic imagery to warrant the emergence of a separate ontology. Whether the prosthetic image in film is used extensively or only intermittently, as is yet usually the case, and whether viewers perceive such imagery as photographic or not, is strictly speaking immaterial in the present context.

Leaving the qualitative difference between photographic and postphotographic images aside, we may go on to explore the consequences of this difference for an understanding of the issues involved in the advent of digital manipulation. However unpopular any hints of an essentialist assumption might be, in the case of cinema the notion of material essence is inextricably linked to the question of functionality, or purpose. Like Bazin, I would argue that the supreme aspiration of the filmic is to record, document and ultimately preserve the memory of physical reality by capturing its traces onto film.<sup>12</sup> “Bazin proposes,” David Bordwell writes, “that

the medium's essence lies exactly in its recording capacity" (72). Cinema's mission is thus one of "exposing and exploring phenomenal reality" (Bordwell 71). Remarkably reminiscent of Bazin's contention is Roland Barthes' statement in *Camera Lucida* that "the photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents" (85), as is his conceptualization of photography as "authentication itself... a certificate of presence" (87).<sup>13</sup> In his history of the evolution of film stylistics, Bordwell himself, notably, discards Bazin's theory: "Bazin's ontological realism is suspect as a candidate for film's essence: cinema can exist perfectly well without photography. We have cartoons which are animated drawings, or which are drawn directly on film, or which are generated on computers" (74). Now, is not this an incontestable assertion? Let me attempt to specify possible counter-arguments.

First of all, note that Bordwell's reference in the latter quotation almost imperceptibly slides from "film" to "cinema." The former denotes the medium, the latter - which is far more comprehensive - the institution. While film refers to the domain of texts and of textuality, the term cinema also includes aspects such as technology and economics.<sup>14</sup> In short, the notion of cinema encompasses the totality of the artifacts that can be placed within that institutional framework which the term signifies. Is it outrageous to suggest that not all texts belonging to this institution - not even all texts we refer to as films - *necessarily* have to verify the essentially filmic?

Secondly, the substance of film-as-text should not be confused with the fabric of the material in which the filmic is deposited, or from which it is being projected. Hence, the definition of film in the sense I am trying to explore here is not "a thin flexible strip of plastic or other material coated with light-sensitive emulsion for exposure in a camera" (*New Oxford Dictionary*). This means that there is no reason to put photographically based filmicity and for instance cartoons drawn directly on film in the same category simply because they share the same physical means of inscription and projection. If one does, one has mistaken a contingent similarity for an ontological similarity.

Thirdly, if the differences between photography, animation and computer-generated images are greater than the similarities, would it not be unacceptably imprecise to maintain that they all manifest the essence or substance of filmicity? Perhaps relying on the "perceptual-realism" (the phenomenological) argument referred to earlier, one may of course object that it is in no way established that the differences outweigh the similarities. The significance of our modes of reception notwithstanding, in addressing ontological problems I suspect that the cause represents a more fruitful point of departure than the effect. That is, it appears that in terms of the nature and process of the artistic composition, animation and postphotographic practices are more closely related to the media of painting and drawing than they are to photography. Whereas the spatial entities that constitute

the photographic image derive from a staged, profilmic event somehow nested in the “external” environment, those that form the non-photographic image emanate from a particular consciousness whose coordinates are “internal” and psychological. The difference is one of reflection-projection.<sup>15</sup> I am certainly not claiming that the photographic image in any way is less manipulated, or less artificial, than animated or digitalized images, but merely that in terms of material basis and means of composition it diverges crucially from the latter.

Barthes’ notion of the *punctum* may help to refine our understanding of the difference between photographic and non-photographic images. For Barthes, the *studium* is that dimension of the photograph which we normally engage with. Our interest in the *studium* may be of an anthropological, aesthetic or generally epistemological nature. The *studium*, Barthes says, is “to like, not to love” (26). The *punctum*, on the other hand, refers to that part of the image that has been captured inadvertently, and which “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26). In paintings, animation and CGI, the *punctum*, I would argue, is an impossibility since these practices engender images in which even the smallest detail in some way must be deliberate. Barthes’ key sentence in this respect is the following: the camera “could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object” (47). Even here Barthes’s theory is reminiscent of Bazin’s, particularly the latter’s endorsement of the idea of ambiguity.<sup>16</sup> His much discussed preference for deep space cinematography, camera movement and the long take rather than editing is commonly thought to indicate this. The montage style as exemplified by someone like Eisenstein, this theory has it, excessively controls the attention of the viewer, thus leaving little room for equivocation and interpretation. Where the camera lingers on a particular space, and exploits the potential of staging actions in depth, the viewers are free to determine which areas within the frame they want to explore. By having cinematic space unfold in uninterrupted duration, the image takes on a sense of ambiguity lost to montage. Andrew astutely condenses the insights of both Barthes and Bazin in this passage:

Everything in a photo is potentially significant, even and especially that which has escaped the control of the photographer pointing the camera. Here the indexical function of the photo comes to the fore, outweighing its iconic function. The photographic plate is etched with experience, like the unconscious (x).

There is a sense of organicism, of fluidity, in the photographic approach that escapes other pictorial media. The relationship between Barthes’ theory of the *punctum* and Bazin’s stress on the immanent ambiguity of the photographic image, however, deserves to be more closely examined in a separate article.

Finally, although Bordwell dismisses Bazin's ontology he does so, it appears, primarily because the scope of artifacts it delineates is too narrow to admit modes such as animation. Bordwell, therefore, does not explicitly repudiate Bazin's contention that the essence and teleology of film is the "fossilization" of experience. However, since for obvious reasons this function does not characterize *all* of the practices and artifacts subsumed under the institution that is cinema, its validity as a definition of filmicity is called into question. At least two theoretical solutions seem to present themselves at this stage. The first, a moderate one, is to concede to Bordwell's objections to Bazin's theory, but nevertheless claim that it does in fact constitute the essence and purpose of photographic film, if not that of animated or digitalized film. More radical is the second solution to the conundrum, which would be to insist that since only photographically based film fulfils the premises of Bazin's ontology, non-photographic forms cannot have the property of filmicity *per se*. Given that they are part of the institution of cinema, they may be regarded as an adjunct species of text that is related to films proper but without partaking of their essential quality.

Though it might appear so, it is not from a desire to stigmatize animated and computer-generated films as being of a lesser order than photographic film that I undertake an analysis such as the above. The essentialist assumption mainly provides a theoretical tool with which more pressing issues may be addressed, not the least important of which is the consistent neglect of Bazin's theory of memory, preservation and commemoration of the past as film's central objective. When confronted with questions that involve the purpose of filmicity, Bazin's thesis has tended to take a backseat to notions of representation, aesthetics and entertainment.<sup>17</sup> From Rudolf Arnheim's assertion that "Art begins where mechanical reproduction leaves off" (57) to the current immersion in digital imagery, the commemorative purpose of film – what Barthes refers to as photography's "power of authentication" (89)<sup>18</sup> – has been largely ignored even despite the efforts of critics and theorists like Bazin and Kracauer.

Filmic manipulation is not a phenomenon that began with CGI,<sup>19</sup> but there is a vital difference between the manipulated effects of the pre-digital image and the computer-generated image. Trick effects, various forms of pyrotechnical wizardry and the routine form of arranging the *mise-en-scène* which occurs in all feature films involve what Barthes sees as "a modification of the reality itself" (1984, 21). As opposed to this kind of manipulation, the space of CGI is entirely in the realm of simulation; what it manipulates is not profilmic reality itself but rather our consciousness of the relation between an event and its representation. David Hockney is among those apprehensive and skeptical of the increasing circulation of digital images and their penetration into the domain of photography proper, fearing that they will destroy the legitimacy of photographs as reflections of the

“real” (In Robins 154). Such a concern clearly reiterates Baudrillard’s critique of the hyperreal and what Celia Lury defines as “the ambition of the signifier to replace or reincarnate the thing it represents” (5). Baudrillard, she claims, radically proposes that “prosthesis does not simply modify the body, but is being imposed as the ‘original’ model of which the individual is a copy” (226).<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Kevin Robins holds that “Through techniques of electronic montage and manipulation, what we once trusted as pictures of reality can now be edited and altered seamlessly and undetectably” (156).

In the remaining part of this paper, it is to the ethical effects of this problem that I would like to (re)turn. As Celia Lury makes explicit in her book *Prosthetic Culture* (1998), photography and CGI represent and entail different ways of seeing, founded on and required by the ontological specificity of each image-yielding practice (3). On a similar note, Robins worries that postphotography will alter “the epistemological structure” of our culture (156). The digital forgery of “real space” is troublesome not only because it can take on the appearance of the photograph and thus deceive the viewer who sees it as an index rather than as a simulation, but also because it by its very nature promotes an additional negation. I have already made a reference to this above, but the subject merits further attention. Toward the end of her book, Lury speculates that the production of digital imagery “adds to the persuasiveness of a notion of utopia, the perfect future, as the past perfected” (219). In embracing this aesthetic of artificially transforming the appearance of the real, postphotography abnegates the particular – the individual manifestation of a phenomenon – in favor of the manufactured ideal. As Baudrillard discerns, the copy indeed becomes the model, one whose utopian perfection meretriciously entices the beholder to relinquish individuality. The eradication of difference implicit in the cosmaesthetics of postphotography is therefore ethically dubious also for this reason. Film surgery represents the inverse of Bazinian sensibility, for as Matthews promulgates, for this theorist “both photography and its spawn, the motion picture, have a special obligation toward reality. Their *principal responsibility* is to document the world before attempting to interpret or criticize it. For Bazin, this duty is ultimately a sacred one” (emphasis added, 23).

Toward the end of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes intimates that he does not consider photography as art, but that in the cases in which it does in fact become an art, its *noeme* – its essence – is forfeited (117). Perhaps it is this uneasy duality that prompts Estelle Jussim to define photography not as a thing but as a *method* (86), one which Mary Price summarizes when she writes that “This is the factuality of the photograph. The photograph authenticates the objects. The objects authenticate the photograph” (175). In stark opposition to this function, the techniques of postphotography, like cosmetic surgery, work to discredit rather than authenticate the object. In her book *Venus Envy* (1997), Elizabeth Haiken charts the evolution

of plastic surgery in the United States, emphasizing the extent to which the cultural cultivation of Tinseltown ideals gave impetus to medical innovation: “As they paged through advertisements and papered their walls with pictures of movie stars, Americans created and participated in a new, visual culture, where appearance seemed to rank even higher in importance” (91). Perversely appropriate is it, therefore, that with the digital manipulation of the film image, cinema itself has become afflicted with the politics of artificiality that it helped to promote.

An awareness of the aesthetic and ethical ramifications of postphotographic imagery is indispensable to the consumer of visual texts in the age of digitalization. As our media cultures become saturated with images that have no material reference, experience - alienated from representation – increasingly becomes subject to falsification. Though I shall refrain from advocating an unqualified return to Bazinian politics, I do believe that Bazin’s emphasis on film’s preservational function may serve to remind us of that moral dimension which is lost in the manufacturing of postphotographic images. The position that underlies my argument may provide one starting point for a long delayed but much needed boost to the ethical criticism of popular culture and the moving image.

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### Notes

1. Marcel L’Herbier labeled the cinematographic the ‘dialectical unity of the real and the unreal’ (quoted in Virilio 65).
2. For a discussion of the partially converging ontologies of the photographic inherent in Bazin and Tarkovsky, see Igor Kor’i?, *Suspended Time. An Analysis of Bazin’s Notion of Objectivity of the Film Image*. Stockholm: U of Stockholm, 1988. 70-77.
3. Roland Barthes zeroes in on this particular quality in his *Camera Lucida* when he maintains that “the photograph is never anything but an antiphon of ‘Look,’ ‘See,’ ‘Here it is’; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis*, and cannot escape this pure deictic language” (5).
4. Evidently, cinema is not the only art in which such a situation arises, but unlike dance, drama and pantomime, film involves also an act of recording. I will return to the significance of this later.
5. The conception of the photograph as a trace is a suggestion also made by among others Susan Sontag, who contends that the substance of the photograph is “something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (154).
6. Siegfried Kracauer, like Bazin advocating a theory of realism in the cinema, attempts in his *Theory of Film* (1960) to provide a bridge between the essence and the function of a given medium (In Noël Carroll 116). Because the essence of film is photography, Kracauer contends, its primary use must be to record reality. This assertion seems to share a significant affinity with Bazin’s notion of film as preservation, though for the latter this objective is inherent in artistic endeavors in general (and not in photography specifically), culminating in the mummification of change facilitated by film.
7. As noted by among others Dudley Andrew, Bazin’s writings fell into serious disrepute after 1968, when the notion of cinematic realism was attacked by the post-classical film theorists like Annette Michelson and Peter Wollen (Andrew, in Lehman 74). Bazin was dethroned even in the journal he helped cofound, the increasingly politicized *Cahiers du Cinéma*. “Ideology,” Andrew notes, “became the cornerstone subtending a new orthodoxy in film theory that reigned into the 1980s during the nadir of Bazin’s influence” (In Lehman 85).

8. In the preface to the 1990 edition of his biography of André Bazin, Dudley Andrew prompts us to ask the question "How appropriate and, indeed, necessary, not how correct, were his ideas then, and how rich are they now?" (vi). It is with an implicit reference to Andrew's question that this paper proceeds.
9. This state of affairs is also underscored by Andrew: "Digitalization allows for the indefinite manipulation of the image, including the photographic image, until its indexical function is obliterated" (In Lehman 78).
10. Several decades earlier Emile Zola expressed a similar sentiment: 'you cannot claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it' (quoted in Sontag 87).
11. This conflict can to some extent be resolved by introducing Monroe Beardsley's distinction between sensorial properties of an artwork (color, texture, form) and purely physical ones (acoustics, light waves etc.). The former pertain to a work's phenomenological level, the latter – which are then beyond perception – to its material level (29-34).
12. Tarkovksy has addressed the question of the purpose of cinema quite explicitly, asking "Why do people go to the cinema?... The search for entertainment? The need for a kind of drug? All over the world there are, indeed, entertainment firms and organisations which exploit cinema and television and spectacles of many other kinds. Our starting-point, however, should not be there, but in the essential principles of cinema... I think that what a person normally goes to the cinema for is *time*: for time lost or spent or not yet had" (63). Although Tarkovksy presents his answer more abstractly than do Bazin and Barthes, all three thinkers seem to share a common understanding of the function of photographically based film.
13. A critic who underscores this kind of epistemological quality in photography is David Brubaker, who submits that "representational images in film have a special epistemic function. Prosecutors, journalists, scientists and political activists may cite Bazin's account to justify their contingent preferences, in some matters of practice, for photographs, films and videotapes" (65).
14. For a more extensive discussion of the nuances and differences of meaning which these two concepts have, see Christian Metz. *Language and Cinema*. Transla. Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeck. The Hague: Mouton, 1974. 50-60.
15. In a defense of Bazin's argument in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," David Brubaker writes that "André Bazin is right that photographs are made without the kind of human intervention which occurs during the production of other artworks, such as paintings. Photographs and film frames are automatic in an exclusive sense, because they are the effects of a particular kind of causal chain that is not associated with paintings" (65).
16. In his treatise on Bazin's seemingly paradoxical advocacy of the objectivity and ambiguity of the photographic image, Igor Kor'ii? maintains that "It is this experience of ambiguity, the result of the mechanical reproduction process that is crucial in Bazin's theory" (79).
17. Matthews' recent plea for a return to a Bazinian philosophy of film expresses a similar concern. "At no other period in its history," he writes, "has cinema been so enslaved by escapist fantasy – and never have we been less certain of the status of the real" (25). Most contemporary film theorists, notwithstanding, appear reluctant to revive Bazinianism, inhabiting instead a kind of position exemplified by Gregory Currie, who claims that "There is too much in Bazin that is confused or simply wrong for his work to constitute the basis of a theoretical renewal" (xxiii).
18. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag espouses a view of photographic practice that accords with Bazin's and Barthes' emphases. "All photographs," she says, "are *memento mori*" (15), and "the force of photographic images comes from their being material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them" (180).
19. Whereas trick cinematography is as old as Georges Méliès, computer-generated imagery is first encountered in films like *Tron* (Steven Lisberger 1982) and *Star Trek: The Wrath of Kahn* (Nicholas Meyer 1982).
20. A similar observation is made by Deborah Foster and John F. Meech in their article "Social Dimensions of Virtual Reality." In Karen Carr and Rupert England. Eds. *Simulated and Virtual Realities. Elements of Perception*. London: Taylor & Francis, 1995. 212.

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# **“I Feel Powerful”: African American Community Radio in Dallas, Texas**

*“The masses of African Americans who have been deprived of educational and economic opportunity are almost totally dependent on radio as their means of relating to the society at large.”*

Martin Luther King, 1967 (quoted in Barlow, 1999, p. 195)

## **Introduction**

U.S. commercial radio stations are held to a looser standard of what constitutes public interest than they once were because of deregulation (Loomis, 1998; McGregor, 1998). But Willis Johnson’s weekday morning program on KKDA-AM (“Soul 73”) in Dallas, Texas continues to broadcast in the tradition of serving in the “public interest, convenience and necessity” (Ramberg, 1986) and of stations serving a predominantly Black audience, such as the legendary WDIA in Memphis, Tenn. (Cantor, 1992).

Critics of U.S. broadcasters, such as the Media Access Project, have said radio and television stations should be held more closely to this obligation, which the courts have interpreted in part to mean providing public access to the airwaves (“Red Lion,” 1999). The detractors of commercial broadcasting have proposed that, in return for the more relaxed interpretation of public service, broadcasters be required to pay spectrum fees for the use of the airwaves, which could in part be used to help fund public broadcasting (Duggan, Oct. 20, 1997). Others have favored the licensing of low-power FM “microbroadcasting” stations as a way of providing service to minority communities (Shields and Ogles, 1995). Commercial broadcasters have opposed both proposals. This case study will show how Willis Johnson’s program on KKDA-AM, with the exceptional access it provides to the African-American community of Dallas, provides an example that, if followed by other commercial broadcast stations, might quiet such calls for change.

## **KKDA-AM’s Format and Programming: Battling The Giants**

KKDA-AM in many ways is a David going against the Goliath of popular formats, fast-talking hosts, and technology-driven media. Adding to the challenge is the fact that this small station operates within an area recognized as the seventh largest market in the nation for advertising (*MEDIALANDS*). Classified as a “Rhythm and Blues” station, KKDA-AM competes in a hotly-contested market

for its share of African-American listeners primarily with three other stations: its own sister station, KKDA-FM, an “urban contemporary” format; KBFB-FM (97.9 The Beat), featuring the “Russ Parr Morning Show with Olivia Fox”; and KTXQ-FM (Magic 94.5) featuring the “Tom Joyner Morning Show.” Parr and Joyner’s programs are nationally syndicated. KKDA-FM, KTXQ-FM and KBFB-FM all enhance their audience reach with colorful, interactive web sites designed to provide another forum for audience interaction (“American Urban Radio”).

By contrast, KKDA-AM does radio the old-fashioned way. A previously designed web site has been abandoned in 2002, and the entire focus of the “Willis Johnson Morning Show” is on the Dallas-Ft. Worth environs. And in “ratings” reports by Arbitron, a leading media audience research organization that ranks station performances, KKDA-AM’s competitors clearly outpace it in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metropolitan market, with KKDA-FM ranking in second place, KBFB-FM, in 18<sup>th</sup>, KTXQ-FM, in 24<sup>th</sup>, and KKDA-AM in a distant 33<sup>rd</sup> place (“Arbitron’s”). In terms of actual audience, another media source attributes some 3,600 listeners to the KKDA-AM morning show, compared to 47,900 for KKDA-FM (“Arbitron’s,” “Dallas-Fort Worth’s No. 7 DMA”).

This case study will show how the “Willis Johnson Morning Show” on KKDA-AM in Dallas, with its unique relationship with its African American audience, provides an example of commercial radio that still operates in the public interest. At the heart of this program’s success is its ability to mobilize listeners for public service as well as entertainment. Under close analysis, this special interaction between KKDA-AM and its morning audience seems to demonstrate that media formats can replicate social learning theory in ways that positively impact audiences and foster community building. Such a model, if followed by other commercial broadcast stations, might mediate the ongoing debate about how such stations could serve their listening communities better.

### **Methodology: Listening In On A Party Line**

Methodology for this study involved monitoring and recording the “Willis Johnson Morning Show” on 12 separate days, from September 14, 1999 to October 7, 1999. About 14 hours of recordings resulted, from which selected excerpts are presented here. In addition, in-depth interviews with program host Willis Johnson, chief executive officer Ken Dowe and two regular listeners to the program were conducted, excerpts of which are also included.

In 1977, behaviorist Albert Bandura identified a social learning process inherent in media’s influence upon audiences. (Bandura, 1977). The basic premise, as he initially described it, postulated that media could shape audience behavior through a specific process of immersion and influence. Moreover, Bandura identified four basic stages, or processes, in the transaction of social learning: attentional, retention,

motor reproduction, and motivational. Although social learning theory since then has been used to explain audience predisposition to violent behavior as “learned” from the media, (see Hogben, M. and Krohn, M.D.), few if any studies have broadly examined how well this theory can explain positive behaviors too.

For African Americans, Black radio formats provide rich media contexts that can illuminate how “community” is framed and enacted. A close examination of transcribed listener calls from KKDA’s the “Willis Johnson Morning Show” illustrates how these stages are emulated. Research has shown the importance of hearing one’s own beliefs reinforced by others via the mass media: “[Black-oriented] radio heightened the racial awareness of Blacks....Its very name intensified racial identification. So did the dialogue that developed between the people behind the microphone and those tuning in to the shows” (Newman, 1988, p. 138).

Hearing Johnson’s program is often like listening in on a “party line.” While these conversations are on one level immensely entertaining, often moving and frequently outrageous, taken as a whole, the body of these exchanges comprises a more powerful dynamic. With an agenda whose “purpose is to serve the Black community, 100% the Black community” (Dowe, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2000), KKDA-AM sustains its links to its listeners by providing a forum to express and reinforce shared values. Social learning theory, amplified by transcribed segments of conversations between host Willis Johnson and various listeners, models a process where the value of community service is taught and supported. In truth, this tradition is an integral part of the historic evolution of Black radio in the United States.

### **History of African-American Radio in U.S.**

The first radio station with an all-Black format (although its owners were white) was probably WDIA in Memphis in 1948; the first Black-owned station was WERD in Atlanta, put on the air by Jesse Blayton Sr. in early October of 1949. The legendary WDIA was known for its “Goodwill Announcements,” which were broadcast free-of-charge. As a WDIA promotional item put it: “It isn’t easy for Negroes to communicate with one another” (Cantor, 1992, p. 197).

Over the years, commercial radio for African-Americans has been subject to opprobrium from critics who have opined that it has inadequately served its audience. As one observer commented, “Far from being a medium for communicating a specifically Negro viewpoint...radio has become, because of its commercial nature, a medium by which the white establishment, through advertising, is actually seeking to sell its values to the Negro” (Kahlenberg, 1966).

Another commentator, writing during the era when desegregation was still the civil rights movement’s chief objective, questioned the very existence of radio targeted at African-Americans: “[Black radio] all too often resorts to an aural

stereotype that leaves no doubt of its 'Negro-ness.' Yet this is the same stereotype that if proffered by a white man — as it was, in fact, by 'Amos 'n' Andy' — would bring down the justifiable wrath of every civil-rights group" (Berkman, 1966).

While all U.S. stations in theory are required to provide community service, the commitment to the ideal seems stronger at Black-oriented stations. "We try to do more than just talk about a problem — we try to provide options, alternatives," said Cathy Hughes, owner of Radio One, one of the few multiple-station groups owned by African-Americans (Bachman, 1999, p. 16).

However, the number of U.S. radio stations owned by African-Americans is declining. In 1995, prior to the passage of the deregulatory Telecommunications Act of 1996, there were 223 stations controlled by Blacks, about 1.95% of the total, according to the National Telecommunications & Information Administration (NTIA). In 1998, the number had declined to 194, about 1.68%. Because limits on ownership have been greatly relaxed, major radio ownership groups are buying up smaller groups and independent operators. (Bachman, 1999). The elimination in 1995 of the FCC's minority tax certificate policy has further led to the erosion of gains in African-American radio station ownership (Krasow, 1997).

#### **A Matter of Choice: KKDA-AM's Recent Programming Decisions**

KKDA-AM's own public-service performance has come into question in recent years. In 1998, KKDA-AM made a dramatic change in its programming. The station that prides itself on its close ties to the African-American community dropped several of its community-oriented talk programs, including "Talk Back: Liberation Radio" with civil-rights activist John Wiley Price. The talk programs were replaced by classic rhythm 'n' blues music (Brumley, October 13, 1998).

Still, Johnson uses his connections with powerful city and African-American community leaders to provide listeners with help for their problems. "Willis has always been active in the community," Ron Kirk, Dallas' first African-American mayor, said. "During my tenure as mayor, he has gone out of his way to assist his listeners with any concerns about the city that they may have. Several times he has connected listeners with my office to address their concerns... He is a tremendous asset to Dallas" (R. Kirk, personal communication, Oct. 17, 2000).

While KKDA-AM struggles in the ratings, its sister station KKDA-FM (K-104) has placed consistently at or near the top of the *Arbitrons* list for several years. K-104's urban contemporary format is targeted at the highly coveted 18-34 demographic group, and attracts listeners of all races. Still, K-104, like KKDA-AM, also is known for its "long-standing community ties." The urban editor for *Radio & Records* magazine, Walt Love, says the FM station is nationally respected for its "ability to look beyond the research and figure out what its listeners — and the community — need from the station" (Brumley, August 25, 1999).

KKDA-AM and KKDA-FM are rare examples of local broadcasting in the post-Telecommunications Act of 1996 era of radio broadcasting. They are privately owned by Dallas businessman Hyman Childs, unlike most large-market stations, which are owned by far-flung corporations. Childs is “as legendary for his business acumen as his reclusiveness” (Brumley, August 25, 1999). He declined to be interviewed for this article.

But Service Broadcasting Chief Operating Officer Ken Dowe said local ownership allows KKDA-AM and KKDA-FM to react quickly to local events and better serve the listeners. “Local, local, local — that’s what people care about,” Dowe said (Brumley, May 28, 2000).

### **Launching the Learning Process: Getting Attention**

As early as 1963, Bandura, along with two other researchers demonstrated that children could learn aggressive behaviors demonstrated by a model (whether live or televised); however, professor Alexis Tan cautions that these findings should be sparingly generalized. He notes three specific factors, including the children’s state of frustration immediately before the modeled act, and the opportunity provided them immediately after the modeled action to imitate what they saw (p. 254). Even from this early experiment, however, the modeled behavior and the contexts in which such behavior is “observed” become key factors in generating audience response. Thus, the first stage of Bandura’s model, the attentional stage, involves a critical relationship between the mediated behavior and the audience, whereby the “model” gains attention in a way that coincides with the audience’s readiness to yield such attention. And while radio is obviously not a visual medium, a skillful host can captivate receptive audiences with the right mix of sounds and conversation. And, after 25 years in the business, KKDA’s Willis Johnson is masterful at convening his listeners’ attention.

KKDA-AM often plays short sound bites of Martin Luther King and other historical African-American figures. “Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we’re free at last!” is dropped in between commercials. Johnson gives credit to program director Chuck Smith for the King drop-ins: “It sets the station apart” (W. Johnson, personal communication, Oct. 22, 1999).

Often, Johnson’s program has provided an outlet for leaders of Dallas’s African-American community to convey their ideas. In 1997, Kirk went on Johnson’s program to explain his criticism of John Wiley Price, the former KKDA-AM talk-show host, for leading raucous demonstrations at Dallas school board meetings. Price, in turn, had organized protest demonstrations outside Kirk’s home (Lee, April 24, 1997).

Surely, the most popular feature of Johnson's program is "Dear Crooner," in which he receives letters from listeners describing their relationship problems. Each day, Johnson features a different letter, which he pre-selects. The premise of "Dear Crooner" is that audience members, after hearing the anonymous writer's concern, can offer advice, or at the very least, dedicate a song to the petitioner that seems to answer their problem. More often than not, the listeners weigh in with strong opinions. A 31-year-old married man and his wife have two little girls, but the couple has been separated for a year. He has asked for a divorce: "She said, 'Oh, no. You ain't going nowhere.' I told her, look, I got somebody else....So now, she's trying to get everything together...but it's too late!" What to do? A caller responds that what's done is done, and it's time to move on: "Look here. I don't understand why anybody would want anybody that don't want them."

Johnson acknowledges that race is central to a great many of the listener calls to KKDA-AM, and says that reflects a desire for community. "The thing that I don't think people realize we've lost: Integration killed a camaraderie [between African-Americans]. The [white] schools still stand....For instance, my high school in Gladewater [Texas] is still there, but Weldon High School, the Black school that I cherished and that I looked forward to going to is done....When you play 'The Horse' by Cliff Noble or you play 'Grazin' in the Grass' by Hugh Masakela it takes you back to Saturday night [when Texas Black high schools used to play their football games], and all of the camaraderie" (W. Johnson, personal communication, Nov. 13, 1999).

So, Johnson's show in general, and the "Dear Crooner" segment" in particular forms a daily "event" whereby the KKDA-AM audience can gather, observe, and participate. Aware that his audience craves an arena in which to vent personal frustrations as well as share social concerns which, if not defined by race may be affected by race, Johnson sets the stage for a process his listeners crave.

### **Stage Two: Mental Rehearsal**

In Bandura's model, the second stage of the social learning theory model is important for setting the stage for eventual behavior modification. This retention stage allows for a period of mental rehearsal where events can be "stored in memory" for future reference (Tan, p. 247). And one good measure of KKDA's effectiveness in this stage is the commitment of long-term listeners to his show. While audiences for most popular music formats often "outgrow" them as listeners age or take on new life priorities, many KKDA-AM callers are regulars who have been calling for years. One such caller is businessman Steve Washington, who has been listening to the station for more than 25 years. "If there was a word I could use to describe Willis' impact upon the entire city, he would be the 'king of information.' He would be the doorway, he would be the guy that opens the gate," Washington stated.

Washington relates the story of a woman who called Johnson's program seeking help saying she had been falsely charged with shoplifting. Johnson called both Kirk and the chief of police, Terrell Bolton. "Chief Bolton said, 'Give me the number and I'll give her a call on the way in and see what we can do to resolve this issue.' The mayor told her to get a lawyer and sue the hell out of 'em, whatever store it was....He [Johnson] is able to touch base with the powers that be and help people in many instances get resolutions to these problems" (S. Washington, personal communication, Oct. 21, 1999).

Johnson reflected: "That lady needed help....Well, I know Terrell Bolton. I knew him before he was police chief. I knew him as a deacon at the Antioch Fellowship Baptist Church in Oak Cliff. Ron Kirk and I have been friends forever. So I can call Ron at home. I called them, and they got on it for her....That's what WDIA would have done" (W. Johnson, personal communication, Oct. 22, 1999).

As with Washington, another long-term listener credits her loyalty to KKDA-AM to her recognition of the show's ability to get the right things done: "If I have a problem, and I can't get it resolved, I know where I can go," said Yolanda Pilch, a homemaker who began listening to KKDA-AM and Willis Johnson's program about 12 years ago. "It gives the people a voice. We all have our own opinions; there are people who really don't like hearing other people's comments. You know, folks get mad at 'M.T.' [a regular caller who often expresses harsh opinions about Black women], they get mad at me." Even the bitter opinions of "M.T." have a value, Pilch claimed. "A lot of women have misconceptions, and they need to hear it [how some men think]." Pilch said she turns some of the contentious calls into family discussions with her young daughter. The call from the woman falsely accused of shoplifting occurred on the day that Pilch was interviewed. "She called Willis, who called the mayor, who called the chief of police. OK? Hey, sister girl is hooked up! She don't have to worry about a thing now."

"It's like having power. I feel very powerful in that way...I can call Willis, and he can call Ron Kirk, he can call Chief Bolton, and Chief Bolton can call me at home. I'm not talking about some little peon patrolman. I can have the chief of police call my house" (Y. Pilch, personal communication, Oct. 21, 1999).

As both Washington and Pilch reiterate, their listening to KKDA-AM confirms a solution for problems that neither have personally experienced. Yet. Clearly, much of the empowerment that both allude to is in knowing the steps for getting help, beginning with making a phone call to the seemingly always-accessible Willis Johnson.

### **Stage Three: Motor Reproduction**

Through the calls and the debates, all of Johnson's listeners are engaged in a kind of rehearsal for living, whether the circumstances involve unhappy

relationships or more serious problems with large bureaucracies. Still rehearsals must eventually lead to action, and in Bandura's third stage, motor reproduction, those who have witnessed modeled behavior move on to attempt imitation. Such a process includes both a period of "trial and error" and "feedback" that allows the learners to grow more proficient (Tan, p. 248).

For Johnson's listeners, the modeled behavior may begin with a phone call to KKDA-AM, but the fuller consequences of this action are much larger. In a very pragmatic sense, Johnson's practice of putting people in touch with others models a community-strengthening behavior or support and encouragement. One example is Erma Griffin, a businesswoman, who says she has been listening to KKDA-AM since the 1970s. Johnson's "Dear Crooner" feature is a strong attraction. "It makes my day...I listen to it because I have a 15-year-old son, and it gives me some insights into the way people are thinking and some of the things that are going on, enhancing me to do better [as a parent]."

Griffin has personally benefited from Johnson's practice of helping listeners in trouble. She said she was falsely ticketed for speeding. "I felt like I was in the right and I didn't have anyone to turn to. And so, he told me to correspond with a sergeant [in the Dallas police department], and I got it taken care of. I got the ticket thrown out completely," she said.

Johnson's weekly feature promoting African-American businesses in the Dallas-Fort Worth area has also been helpful to Griffin: "I have had people walk into my store and say, 'You were here on Soul 73, Willis Johnson announced your location.' I had at least four or five people come in." Griffin said KKDA-AM helps to fill a public information void for the African-American community in the Dallas area. "It's a [racial] mix on TV, and you might hear one thing, but if it comes from [Black] radio, they take more heed" (E. Griffin, personal communication, Nov. 17, 1999).

Often, callers contact Johnson on behalf of others. A woman asks where to find help for a young single mother. "A friend of my daughter just had a baby....And she was sick during the time she had the baby. So while she was in the hospital, somebody broke in her apartment and took everything she had." Johnson refers the caller to a woman who leads a social-service agency. A male caller asks Johnson where to find assistance in managing "disobedient children." Johnson refers the caller to the local "First Offender Program." "It is an excellent program, and I've seen it work," Johnson tells the caller. A concerned parent calls to say that a gang is harassing her son and his friends. "If we have other parents out there that are concerned about their children...we really need to get involved in getting these boys [the gang members] out of that school," she says. At Johnson's prompting, she asks other parents to call her.

In the end, information is Johnson's stock and trade—valuable capital that was always seen as the primary purpose for mass media. And even his most

influential listeners use Johnson's show to demonstrate how the collective voices of the KKDA-AM audience and others in the community can make things happen, as in the case with this call from Texas state Senator Royce West. West came on the program to discuss a new law that helps telephone customers who are behind in paying their bills: "I was able to amend a bill that requires telephone companies — now listen to me, Willis — it requires telephone companies to divide those bills between the local service and long-distance service," West said. If a person is behind in paying for long-distance service, the telephone company is not permitted to cut off local service, West told the audience.

### **Final Stage: Motivation to Keep on Going**

Bandura's final stage, motivational processes, looks at motivation as the key factor in ensuring that behaviors are reinforced. His schema, which develops external, vicarious, and self reinforcements, makes these expected outcomes an "important influence on future enactments." (Tan, 248) Johnson's interactive show skillfully involves reinforcements of many kinds that are suggested by this model: the social approval coming from external sources; the satisfaction experienced vicariously when other listeners solve problems, and the internal rewards from having acculturated the values and behaviors Johnson models.

Johnson's influence with people in Dallas' Black community extends beyond his KKDA-AM morning program. He often speaks at social functions, with effects that sometimes spill over onto the airwaves. The owner of a small catering business says he was about ready to quit before hearing Johnson speak but now has renewed determination: "Ever since then all I've been saying is Lord, have mercy, just continue to give me strength...But I just wanted you to know I really appreciate what you shared that night."

Johnson was honored in 1997 by the Dallas-Fort Worth Association of Black Communicators with its Lifetime Achievement Award. The award was for his many community service activities since arriving at KKDA-AM in 1975 (Adams-Wade, June 3, 1997).

### **Discussion: The Past as Future**

Willis Johnson sees himself as the inheritor of a great tradition. He speaks intensely and earnestly. "I grew up listening to a guy by the name of Matt Walker in Tyler, Texas, on KZEY, and his diction wasn't the greatest, his English wasn't the greatest, but he was a great communicator" (W. Johnson, personal communication, Oct. 22, 1999).

Dowe remains optimistic that KKDA-AM can continue to provide its unique service to the African-American community of Dallas-Fort Worth. "I think [KKDA-AM can survive] as long as we have the support of K-104 and KRNB. I think

there's going to be no change in our position...As long as Hyman Childs owns these three radio stations, there's going to be a KKDA [AM]" (K. Dowe, personal communication, August 24, 2000).

But Johnson fears that the community-oriented programming KKDA-AM provides may disappear someday. "It's a fading star...I don't think it's going to be passed on. When this particular generation fades out...I don't know, things come full circle, but I don't think in my lifetime I'll see it again" (W. Johnson, personal communication, Oct. 22, 1999).

### **Conclusion: Learning to Reinvent Community Service**

Willis Johnson's daily morning program on KKDA-AM is an example of a commercial broadcasting station that fulfills the Federal Communications Commission's injunction to serve in the "public interest, convenience and necessity," a dictate that has become less and less meaningful in recent years. Johnson's program excels in providing the Black community of Dallas with access to the airwaves, even while operating in an environment that requires less public service from radio stations (Loomis, 1998; McGregor, 1998), and while some other community-oriented programs on KKDA-AM have been cancelled.

The calls to Willis Johnson's program provide a unique and candid insight into the hearts and minds of the African-American community of Dallas. The topic of African-Americans as a community within multiethnic areas has been addressed by Hutchinson, Rodriguez and Hagan (1996). And as Johnson observed, it is obvious there is a desire for a sense of community, a sense of camaraderie that is in some way satisfied for the listeners of his daily program on KKDA-AM. The frankness with which callers discuss relations between African-Americans is remarkable, and is not likely to be matched on any other station.

Some of the criticisms of Black radio that were made in the 1960s and 1970s could still be made today of the programs on "Soul 73." Certainly, KKDA-AM, like other commercial stations, is very much a vehicle for advertising) and some of the promoted products, such as miracle weight loss potions, may be considered of dubious value (Kahlenberg, 1966). Additionally, several of the air personalities (other than Johnson) do tend to project the "aural stereotype" of Black rhythm 'n' blues radio noted by Berkman (1966).

The current regulatory environment that tends to work against Black ownership (Bachman, 1999) makes the existence of such a community-oriented station even more improbable and raises questions of how long KKDA-AM and other similar stations will survive under present conditions. KKDA-AM is not successful in the way that success is typically measured in commercial radio — big ratings, high advertising rates, big profits — but it deserves credit for doggedly sticking to the old notion that radio has an obligation to serve the public interest. Under close

analysis, this special interaction between KKDA-AM and its morning audience seems to demonstrate that media formats can replicate social learning theory in ways that positively impact audiences and foster community building. Such a model, if followed by other commercial broadcast stations, might mediate the ongoing debate about how such stations could serve their listening communities better.

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- Willis Johnson, KKDA-AM morning host, Oct. 22 and Nov. 13, 1999
- Yolanda Pilch, KKDA-AM listener, Oct. 21, 1999
- Steve Washington, KKDA-AM listener, Oct. 21, 1999

## Stone Throwing in Glass Houses: When Baby Boomers Met Generation X

*More than once, I've caught young people quizzing me pointedly on the Sixties and felt the distinct unease that they were not rapt in admiration at our sadly mixed achievements, but were scrutinizing our mistakes to avoid repeating them. We know firsthand what trouble the young can cause for the old when the old have it coming, and now we are the Establishment. Sixties counterculturalists told us not to trust anyone over thirty. They were right. They were talking about us.*

Mike Males

What is so unique about Arlington as a national cemetery is its ability to encompass so much history in so little space. With JFK's grave so prominent, this resting place on the Potomac is perfect for thinking about the idea of torches being passed; within its gates lie the death of one generation and the birth of the next. It is the earthly home of the generational phoenix.

The deaths of past generations abound in this cemetery. The oldest graves, up near the Arlington House, are those marking America's coming of age — the Civil War. Newer graves mark the end of the Baby Boomer's coming of age — the spacious area and eternal flame of JFK and his wife Jackie, civil rights figures such as Thurgood Marshall and Medgar Evers, and even a special grave for the celebrated Joe Louis. Still the most potent marker to this generation is the simple grave of Robert F. Kennedy. At the end of the sixties, after Malcolm, Martin, and all the rest were assassinated, after Vietnam had stopped being the glorious battle for American ideals, after the students at Kent State had become rotting corpses and long-standing memorials, the event which seems to mark the end of this generation of hope and despair seems to be the assassination of RFK, the last hope of a generation of liberalism, not because of his brothers or who he was, but because of who he was becoming. He left behind him a country soon to be reborn in Watergate and a generation more like and therefore unlike anything he had ever dreamed. A number of events have intersected here at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first to produce a generation unlike any which has gone before: the thirteenth generation of Americans, more commonly known as Generation X.

Numerous books have been written about us; most tend to paint a very dismal picture of my generation as aimless, cynical, unwanted, and rebellious. My generation stands at the edge of some significant paradigm shifts in the way mankind

sees itself, and such a position must be taken seriously, but I would argue that changing attitudes evident in my generation make us the first generation to actually have a chance socially to grow exponentially at a rate to keep up with the technology which shapes so much of our perspectives. Our generation, the first Postmodern generation, is very different from the one before it, but in many ways it is the Bridge Generation between Boomers and the Millennials, who will operate in a paradigm almost unrecognizable to Boomers. The "X" name was given to us by Boomers who either could not understand us or thought we had no sense of true identity. I will refer to my generation as the Bridge Generation, "Bridgers," if you will, the first of American generations to be shaped almost completely through media and electronic technology.

Generation X ultimately may be renamed the Bridge Generation because it holds the chaotic space between a way of life which was before the Digital Age and the way of life that is to come after its birth. It finds itself in a precarious situation, not able to rely on those constructs that generations before us treated as their foundations for stability. Many of us did not grow up with religion as an integral part of our lives, and those who did find themselves questioning their core beliefs in a world where each religion, sect, and denomination seems equally valid. The political and religious scandals of the last quarter century have forced us to admit that the Emperor is naked, that much of what we have constructed our identities upon is sand on the beach. And even for those of us who grew up in stable homes, there was ample proof in the homes around us that even our assumptions about the permanence of the familial structure might be wrong. The World Wide Web which has us entangled puts us constantly in global communication with people whose beliefs diametrically oppose those local traditions which children have historically accepted to be universal.

The result is a generation that puts little faith in any reality other than the immediate, the local, the sensory. Consequently, generation X is fascinated by fast moving, bright images and brilliant color (why the Leonardo DiCaprio version of *Romeo and Juliet* hits home, while the Zeffirelli version is left on the shelves). It explains the appeal of strong emotions that they can feel immediately, whether it is the in-your-face type shows such as *Married With Children* or *South Park* or the commercials such as Nike's "Just Do It" ads.

While scholars debate the exact date of Generation X, the mid 1960s seem the most accepted date to mark the birth of the earliest members of my generation. Their earliest possible memories involve Watergate, and most would grow up during the Iranian hostage crisis. Adolescence for the earliest of this generation would hit at the same time Reagan became president, and for many he is the first president they remember being elected. It should be no surprise then that this generation combines an institutional skepticism instilled in them since birth with a patriotism they have had since puberty.

Bridgers as a generation, have had a major “attitudinal adjustment” similar to mine when I visited the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany. The camp was originally built in the 1930s to imprison communists, later expanding to include Jews, and other “undesirables.” After the war, the communists took over the prison and imposed the same tortures on the jailors as had been done to them as the jailed. In America, similar hypocrisies have taught Bridgers to be cautious of any person promoting an agenda. Blacks marching in the Civil Rights Movement of the Sixties had a legitimate complaint, but once blacks began to see progress, many of them wanted to simply use that power to place themselves in a privileged position over whites and other races. Women had a legitimate complaint against patriarchal society, but their assertions of universal equality diminished; the remaining voices speaking sought to show women’s superiority. Concerning religion, race, sex, or any other classification, Bridgers have concluded that what most people and institutions want is not to be treated equally but to attain the privileged slot they fight to get others out of.

One of the most potent signs of this difference was the reactions of American Boomers and Bridgers after the horrendous shootings at Columbine High School in April 1999. Within hours Boomers were on television insisting that we call these kids monsters, not human beings, for what they did. But as the kids who were actually in the high school began to speak to the public, you could hear a different tone. One of the kids who was shot refused to categorize his shooters as the twisted creatures the media was making them out to be: “I knew Dylan,” he said, “We had a chemistry class together. He wasn’t a monster. He was just a normal kid.” It wasn’t an issue of “monster” or “kids taken by Satan” versus “human” as some Boomers asserted. As one of the other Columbine students put it, “Dylan was a good kid. He made some bad decisions.” Rather than searching for easy excuses, many Bridgers and Millennials took more direct action. Students began to sign pledges to end the isolating cliques and the harassment that has been a tradition in high school. A day after another shooting in Paducah, Kentucky, cards were found that read: “We forgive you, Mike,” and “We forgive because God forgave us.” The sister of Michael Carneal, the killer, was invited to sing at the funeral of one of the girls he killed (Pederson 35).

Still some Boomers wanted to reduce these events to binary issues — the boys in Littleton were evil, and “we” are good. In an attempt at reconciliation and healing, a carpenter from Indiana placed fifteen crosses on a hill overlooking Littleton, including two for Harris and Klebold. Within hours, two of the fathers of slain children had dug up the crosses for the two murderers, claiming they didn’t have any right to be there. The very isolation and stigmatizing that led Harris and Klebold to their acts continued after their deaths. The next day the carpenter came and removed all of the crosses; if there cannot be help for all, there will be none for any.

After the initial grief over the Paducah shooting, the parents of the three little girls murdered began to look for someone to blame, filing lawsuits against not only the media, film industry and Internet porn sites, but also against 44 other people, mostly students, teachers, and administrators who allegedly might have prevented the tragedy if they had read the signals properly. Predictably such an “us vs. them” mentality has torn the town apart. Even after the judge removed 35 of the 45 names from the list of people to be sued, the parents appealed the ruling and added three more teachers and five more students. Among those added was Ben Strong, the heroic student who had actually persuaded Carneal to stop firing. He had been told by Carneal five days before the shooting that something big was going to happen (Pederson 35).

I do not want to generalize this into an argument suggesting that Boomers are all hypocritical and Bridgers are all noble spirited; there are many Boomer parents who truly want to find healing, and there are Bridgers who will certainly go on isolating those who are different from themselves. What I do believe is that Bridgers as a generation are cautious when they hear rhetoric from other generations – about race, sex and a host of other issues—which ends up substituting for action.

Perhaps the best writer to understand this contradiction in American life was Mark Twain, who lived during another major paradigm shift around the Second Industrial Revolution. His writings suggest that our world is not a binary existence – that people who simply want easy answers or simple solutions without considering their validity only contribute to the problems they claim to want to solve. This philosophy is evident in the war on terrorism, where the enemy may have the backing of a state government, but the U.S. stresses that its war is only with the government, not the people. We feed the people while trying to overthrow their government. The binary world of ally/enemy is insufficient. In the 1990s, movies like *Crimson Tide*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *American History X* reflected a different philosophy whereby characters are given not simple choices or roles but complex situations through which to respond. In the 1890s Mark Twain was suggesting the same thing; encouraging writers such as Toni Morrison to proclaim that Bridgers should read Twain as soon as they are able to read anything:

That was a watershed event in my life. Nearly everything I had read before that time was a work produced and marketed in the category of “children’s books,” which meant that the stories were sanitized, simple in concept and vocabulary and of very little interest to anyone over the age of twelve. *Huckleberry Finn* was something else. In the literature I was familiar with, fathers had always been shown as patient, honest and decent. Huck’s father was none of those things. Basically, old man Finn was pond scum. In the books I had previously encountered, it did sometimes happen

that some people did bad things, but there was a clear explanation given for that kind of behavior: they were bad people. Wondering, I found that in *Huckleberry Finn* some seriously bad things — things like the possession and mistreatment of black slaves, like stealing and lying, even like killing other people in duels — were quite often done by people who not only thought of themselves as exemplarily moral but, by any other standards I knew how to apply, actually were admirable citizens. Tom and Huck did not live in a simple world. The world they lived in was filled with complexities and contradictions — was, in short, I was surprised to discover, in many ways quite a lot like the world I appeared to be living in myself (Morrison xxxiv).

In a world where Xers have the technology to talk to anyone in the world about any topic they choose before they even reach puberty, the ability to shelter kids from reality is no longer possible; we must struggle instead to find ways to introduce them to the complexities of their situations as early as possible. In many ways Huck Finn represents Bridgers, either as the inner city kid learning to jump out of bed and hit the floor at the sound of a drive-by shooting, or the decadent upper class Manhattanite yuppie pictured in *Less Than Zero*, overdosing on cocaine at a glitzy party. As Morrison further describes:

Although Huck complains bitterly of rules and regulations, I see him to be running from not external control but from external chaos. Nothing in society makes sense; all is in peril. Upper-class, churchgoing, elegantly housed families annihilate themselves in a psychotic feud, and Huck has to drag two of their corpses from the water — one of whom is a just-made friend, the boy Buck; he sees the public slaughter of a drunk; he hears the vicious plans of murderers on a wrecked steamboat; he spends a large portion of the book in the company of “[Pap’s] kind of people” (Twain 166) — the fraudulent, thieving Duke and King who wield brutal power over him, just as his father did. No wonder that when he is alone, whether safe in the Widow’s house or hiding from his father, he is so very frightened and frequently suicidal. (Morrison xxxiv)

So who is this generation, and what do they believe? Initial writings from people like Douglas Copland portrayed this new generation as lost, Net surfing, nihilistic nipple piercers whining about McJobs. Latchkey legacies fearful of commitment. Passive and powerless, they were content, it seemed, to party on in a Wayne’s Netherworld, one with more anti-heroes such as Kurt Cobain, Dennis Rodman, the Menendez brothers. These portrayals were wrong but generally

accepted by the public, especially marketers. Coca-Cola test marketed a drink for teens called “OK” soda. The gray cans featured grim designs, including one of a doleful youth slumped outside two idle factories. Slogans on the cans read, “Don’t be fooled into thinking there has to be a reason for everything,” and “What’s the point of OK soda? Well, what’s the point of anything?” The nine-city campaign fizzled (Hornblower 58).

Some of this portrayal is the typical generational frustration that the older inherently feels for the younger. Boomers see the unwillingness of Xers to commit to anything too quickly as a signal of apathy. This interpretation is based upon facts such as Xers registering as Independents and deciding they were much better at deciding their spirituality than some figure up in the pulpit. Boomers like Christina Hoff Sommers express frustration at what they see as “moral nihilism.” In one speech Sommers marvels at the fact that Xers are so likable — much more likable than the Boomers. Sommers says, “This is a generation of kids that despite relatively little moral guidance or religious training, is putting compassion into practice,” (Sommers 477). After these comments, Sommers bemoans the lack of absolutism among Xers. “The same person who works weekends for Meals on Wheels, who volunteers for a suicide prevention hotline or a domestic violence shelter might tell you `Well, there is no such thing as right or wrong’” (477). Sommers suggests that such beliefs are no better than those of a common sociopath. She is wrong. She fails to see the consistency in a philosophy that suggests personal responsibility and lack of an absolute authority. This is not “cognitive moral confusion” as Sommers calls it, but a manifestation of the self-reliance Xers have grown up with.

Many analysts and pundits are acknowledging that the first X rays of the new generation were distorted. “The baby boomers of the media and marketing world were desperate to explain a generation they didn’t understand, so they reduced Xers to a cartoon,” claims Adam Morgan, managing partner at TBWA Chiat/Day. “It may be the most expensive marketing mistake in the history” (Hornblower 58).

A generation is forged through a common experience. It is true that much of what defines Xers is negative input, but Xers have not used this to become negative themselves. The generation described as “matures,” born from 1909-1945 was shaped by the Depression and World War II. “Boomers,” born from 1946 to 1964, grew up in affluence: economic progress was assumed, freeing them to focus on idealism and personal growth. Young Xers, however, lurched through the recession of the early ‘80s, only to see the mid-decade glitz dissipate in the 1987 stock market crash and the recession of 1990-91. Gen X could never presume success. In their book *Rocking the Ages*, Yankelovich, Smith and Clurman blame Xers’ woes on their parents:

Forget what the idealistic boomers intended, Xers say, and look instead at what they actually did: divorce. Latchkey kids. Homelessness. Soaring

national debt. Bankrupt Social Security. Holes in the ozone layer. Crack. Downsizing and layoffs. Urban deterioration. Gangs. Junk Bonds. The temptation to become simply a part of the system—to acquiesce—can be strong, but rather than do that, Xers have revealed a strong competitive streak, reflected in slogans like NO FEAR. (Hornblower 58)

This competitiveness and disregard for binary absolutes is also reflected in their politics and their views on government. The principles on which America was founded are ones with which the Xers agree; it is the present implementation of those principles (through religious and political institutions) which Xers have no faith in. Unlike older traditionalists, Bridgers distrust the concepts of a collective national will, are suspicious of consensus, and hate to see dissenters coerced. We are unlike supply siders with their tendency toward deficits and debts, and are not as intensely committed to idealized individualism as older libertarians (Howe 164). Bridgers do not believe that a huge bureaucratic system is the way to deal with national problems like spotty health insurance. We would rather trust our immediate communities to come up with local solutions which allow for immediate idiosyncrasies. But before you try to label this group “conservative,” remember that Bridgers are opposed strongly to issues like censorship, failure to protect the environment, and prohibiting abortion. Howe points out that rather than commit to a party platform, Bridgers operate on basic principles: wear your politics lightly, so that you may change them when necessary; survival comes before ideology; fix only what is fixable; clean up after your own mess; and finally, a candidate’s personal style says more than his credentials or platforms about how he will perform in office (165-70). “The do-it-yourself, no-one-is-going-to-look-out-for-me-but-me spirit among Xers is a product of coming of age when that was the message coming from the Administration,” says Mia von Sadovsky, 29, an ad agency researcher. A survey by *Third Millennium* found that 53% of Gen Xers believe that the TV soap opera *General Hospital* will outlast Medicare. If permitted, 59% of Xers would opt out of Medicare and save on their own. Of any adult generation, they have the weakest attachment to political parties, and in 1992 Gen Xers cast a higher percentage of votes for Ross Perot than any other adults did. “We have a libertarian streak,” says Thau, a student interviewed by Margaret Hornblower. “We grew up in a period with one instance of government malfeasance and ineptitude after another, from Watergate to Iran Contra to the explosion of the Challenger to Whitewater. We believe government can’t be trusted to do anything right” (Hornblower 58).

Whether it is political parties or marketing blitzes, Xers have become more aware of how people manipulate us: in our political lives we have Watergate and Vietnam and all the “Gates” since; in religion there are the televangelists’ scandals, priests as child molesters, and the use of God by churches to justify discrimination.

This manipulation led to an interesting statistic during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. When Bridgers were asked how they felt about the sex part of the Clinton story and his lying about it, they didn't particularly care. When Boomers and former generations cried, "Where's the shame?!" Bridgers responded with, "Like you were any better!" That was the attitude expressed in a Letter to the Editor by one Bridger in response to a Boomer named Mrs. Fields:

Mrs. Fields states, "The unmasked private man of sordid tastes cannot be a good public man with credibility." Does she mean the "unmasked private man" who is in office? I hope so, because history has unmasked many seemingly good public men with credibility as quite sordid characters... Thus, if one is well acquainted with history and contemporary sociology, he or she is not shocked by this "current event." I am of the opinion that the same internal forces that drive elected men to great acts of leadership, drive them in other, less moral directions. They have tremendous strengths and equally powerful weaknesses. The same holds true for many of our great artists, athletes, writers and thinkers: Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway and Martin Luther King to name a few.

When I hear a disgusted political pundit such as Mrs. Fields ask, "Is a president who degrades the dignity of the (Oval) office fit to be president?" I am equally disgusted —not at the president, but at such an asinine question coming from a pundit's ostensibly partisan ignorance of history and truth. I think Mrs. Fields should be more careful when writing what amounts to an "in it, but not of it" inside-the-Beltway commentary. (Eberhardt A14)

Succeeding revelations proved that this writer was very astute politically, as senators and representatives were ousted for their own personal troubles and consequent hypocrisy. This "Do As I Say Not As I Do" parenting style is clearly evident in modern life when politicians such as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich championed absolutist moral standards and "family values." When questioned about his own extramarital affairs, divorce, and failure to support his children, Gingrich asserts "a clear distinction between my private life." When President Clinton was confronted by the press (not to mention his daughter Chelsea) on the bad example his cigar smoking set for his anti-youth-smoking-crusade, Clinton replied, "I don't think that's the point. The issue is whether children are smoking cigarettes" (Males 268).

The disillusionment with authority, both political and religious, extends as well for Bridgers into the family. With good reason:

If boomers once boasted of never trusting anyone over 30, Xers have

even more cause for disillusion. Between 1965 and 1977, the divorce rate doubled. More than 40% of today's young adults had spent time in a single-parent home by age 16. Did the psychic toll produce latch-key basket cases or self-reliant survivors? Undoubtedly, both. In their coupling habits, Gen X is the "youngest copulating and oldest marrying generation ever recorded," note Strauss and Howe. Since 1970 the average marriage age has crept up from 23 to 27 for men and 21 to 25 for women. For many, it signals caution born of pain. "If I marry, I will never get divorced," says Angel Gambino, a University of Oregon law student whose parents split when she was three. Next year she plans to move back with her mother and sister, following another trend. Whether for economic or emotional reasons, 30% of men and women in their 20s live with their parents. "For me, Gambino says, "the American Dream is a stable family." (Hornblower 58)

Bridgers mock Boomers' bewailing of "moral apathy and decline." After all, the Boomers and former generations are the ones who got us here. Minority groups who were so influential in the Sixties have lost their luster. The inner cities, once seen as positioning themselves on solid moral and economic ground, have become filled with drugs, violence, and death. Meanwhile the institutions which also got us here seem to have escaped the consequences of their actions, while Bridgers are asked to foot the bill socially and financially. As Howe and Strauss point out, Boomer teens who got in trouble heard political leaders call for social services; Bridgers who get in trouble hear calls for boot camp, prisons, and swift executions. Boomers got us into this mess and now complain that they wanted pumpkins when they planted watermelon seeds. It's as though the national conscience finally decided to do something about the giant collective Boomer ego, but after taking aim and winding up with a club to bash them for all the damage they did, America swung late, missed, and hit the next bunch of saps to come walking by — the Bridgers. It should not be surprising that Bridgers are skeptical of the authority which has done very little good for them and lots of harm:

They fume when they hear Boomers taking credit for things Boomers didn't do (civil rights, rock n' roll, stopping the Vietnam War) and for supposedly having been so much more creative, idealistic, morally conscious, and generally *better* than 13ers. When they watch Boomer films wallow in self-absorption over "what we did" in the '60s. When they hear fortyish professors lecture them for being sexist, racist, amoral morons. Through it all, today's young adults sometimes wonder: *Can't those boomers see how they look to us?* The 13er image of the proto-Boomer is an ugly mosaic built out of the worst figments of each Boomer phase of life. The klutzy naivete of vintage Mouseketeer preteens blends

into the flaky radicalism of Woodstock hippies, into the dissolute narcissism of Travolta disco dancers, into the sharper image of consumerism of brie-and-chablis yuppies, into the smug pomposity of today's politically correct neopuritans. Thirteens see Boomers as the most colossally manipulative hypocrites in the million-year history of *Homo sapiens*. (Howe 48)

No issue illustrates the tension between Boomers and Bridgers more than the issue of teen prohibition. Mike Males takes an extensive look at the hypocrisy of Boomers in "Two-Fisted Double Standards." Males tracks the record of teenage drunkenness arrests and traffic violations. What he finds is that teenage prohibition laws were enacted during the seventies when, for the first time, arrests and accidents were actually on the decline. Why at this point? Simple profit. Creating such an issue would profit and advance the agencies and programs that arose in the 1970s and '80s to address alcohol, safety, and youth issues. Males tracks how agencies used teens in the '80s and '90s as scapegoats, seeing them as easy prey, since increasingly fragile families turned to government, laws, programs, and professionals to fill in where parents were opting out to focus on their own careers and needs. Such duplicity had nothing to do with some massive highway carnage resulting from teenagers, or any "national desire" to protect the young, and apparently not any genuine increase in alcohol damage in general. Nor did raising the drinking age produce any noteworthy benefit in any of these areas.

The principal benefits accrued? Adult economic advantage, public moralizing while privately protecting adult alcohol access, and invoking governmental controls on the young to make up for rising family instability — in other words, more evidence of Boomer hypocrisy. If the adult motive in removing teen drinking rights was a benign one to protect youth, as many advocates claimed, it is curious that such protection did not extend into areas such as military combat, where youth participation might have resulted in increased adult risk, exposure, and obligation. This "we don't care" contradiction was most evident in the fury expressed by Candy Lightner, witness for MADD, who told lawmakers she was "sick and tired" of hearing the complaint that youths were old enough to be sent to war but not to drink (Males 201).

Lightner was motivated to organize MADD because her daughter was killed by a drunk driver — an adult drunk driver. MADD's newsletter printed the ages of drunk drivers only when they were under 21. In fact, Lightner ended up on the payroll of the brewery industry opposing efforts to toughen laws against adult drunk driving (Males 201). Such an attitude towards teen drinking seems even more hypocritical when we examine the statistics of who is driving drunk. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's *Traffic Safety Facts* show that

adults are committing 90 percent of the intoxicated motor damage; those between the ages of 21 and 34 account for more than half of all fatal drunken traffic mishaps (Males 202). What becomes evident to Bridgers when the facts are shown, is the difference between the rhetoric of Boomers and the reality of their actions.

There was an interesting, less-trumped statistic in the Lewinsky surveys to Bridgers. While Bridgers were willing to forgive Clinton his adultery and his lying about it, many of them expressed serious reservations about his using his friends and abusing those friendships in the process. His betrayal broke a more sacred contract: above all else Bridgers value their personal relationships, even more than success. As one friend of mine put it, "My job and success show what I have done; my relationships with my family and friends show who I am. The second is infinitely more important than the first!" Part of this response indicates a generation whose immediate ties to home are hampered by parental absence and smaller family size, which leads them to value relationships made even more than those inherited. In a post-war generation like the Boomers where each baby was a treasure to be had, the kids grew up with a strong sense of self and individuality. While this might have been a positive thing, it also led to an estrangement from community in practice. The opposite holds true for the Bridgers who, forced to grow up much more independently, would clamp on to community relationships like drowning men when good ones arose.

Books like *Welcome to the Jungle* and *13<sup>th</sup> Generation* take a look at the development of this phenomenon. A strong Malthusian movement during the sixties focused on Malthus and overpopulation, resulting in support for contraceptives. Concurrently the women's rights movement successfully shifted public attitudes on issues such as the right to abortion and women's desire to leave the home and enter the workplace. General opinion reflected a devaluing of children and families and a strong emphasis on individual freedoms. One manifestation of this change was the creation of the bad-baby horror film. Beginning in 1962 with *Children of the Corn*, audiences flocked to see such movies as *The Exorcist*, *The Omen Trilogy*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Demon Seed*, all the way up through the early '80s. It is not coincidental that just as the first Bridgers would have been reaching the age to see such movies that the demand and hence the production of this genre died. As the demographics shifted to a younger generation, movie production centered around successful teenagers developing strong relationships in movies like *Secret of My Success* and *St. Elmo's Fire*.

Bridgers were born into a world where children were seen as the enemies to the progress of Boomers. Michael Males divides the Baby Boomers into three distinct groups: (1) So-called adults who, admitting their self-indulgences, decided to postpone adulthood until late middle-age and wisely chose not to have kids; (2) a minority who, having had kids, rearranged their lifestyles more or less radically

to raise them more or less responsibly. Males says both of these groups deserve admiration, "It is as much maturity from us as you're going to get." (267). The third group — a fairly large one — reproduced with little or no clue as to what the monumental task of child-raising actually entails:

The revelation that children demand parents who give up addictions, petty inabilities to get along, and general lifelong self-indulgence was bitterly unwelcome news to this group—especially since the carefree condominium lifestyle of the childless yuppie, particularly those with double incomes, no kids, super-opulence was abundantly flaunted before their eyes in the 1970s and 80s. These are the so-called parents who angrily, indignantly act as if nature and the universe had let them down, demanded that higher authorities raise their kids. There have always been parents less mature than their children, of course, but the Baby Boom sprouted them in job lots – and affluent enough to demand services. (268)

Raised under latchkey or after-school programs, Bridgers look for social ties. In survey after survey, many kids — even those on the honor roll — say they feel increasingly alone and alienated, unable to connect with their parents, teachers, and sometimes even classmates. They're desperate for guidance, and when they don't get what they need at home or in school, they cling to cliques or immerse themselves in a universe out of their parents' reach, a world defined by computer games, TV and movies (Kantrowitz 36).

As E. Dionne Jr. points out in an article in *The Washington Post*, what this generation seeks perhaps more than anything is a sense of balance between self-reliance and strong communal relationships. This is obvious in my classes at Penn State as well. In evaluations or during office visits students often express frustration when the teacher seems to have no specific relationship with them individually. They already know and recognize the expectations of doing the work, but they define their classes as successful based upon what personal fulfillment they receive.

What we are seeing is something unique in the social development of youth. Since they first emerged as a demographic entity early in the nineteenth century, adolescents have carved out their own secret worlds, inventing private codes of styles and behavior designed to communicate only within the in group and to exclude or offend adults. But lately this developmental process has come under great strain. "In the past the toughest decision [teens] had was whether to have sex, or whether to use drugs," says Sheri Parks, who studies families and the media at the University of Maryland. "Those are still there, but on top of those are piled all these other issues, which are very difficult for parents or children to decipher." New technologies and the entertainment industry, combined with changes in family

structure, have more deeply isolated grown-ups from teenagers. The results are what Hill Walker, co-director of the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior calls “almost a virtual reality without adults.” (Leland 45)

What makes Generation X so distinct is that it is the first generation since adolescents became a separate demographic to grow up with many of the authoritarian constructs terribly weakened if not destroyed. Due to the rapid development of technology, this generation is also the first wherein adolescents and young adults know more about progress and have a broader perspective of the globe than their parents, who in many cases cannot even access the cyberworld so critical to their children’s existence and identity.

Bridgers hate large movements with their grandiose rhetoric and promises. Pragmatism is a virtue; change should come incrementally and through a more personalized form of activism. Asked if “all products that pollute the environment should be banned,” only a third of Xers agreed, vs. half of Boomers. Self-righteousness has given way to situational ethics. Their parents fought attack dogs and fire hoses to desegregate lunch counters; now Xers struggle with ambiguous battles over affirmative action, where helping blacks and Hispanics arguably hurts Asians and whites. Xer activism is a chain Internet letter calling friends to “Save Sesame Street” by e-mailing Congress about public television funding. Or it is donating a few hours to transport meals to AIDS patients. Independent Sector, a Washington-based research group, found that 38% of 18- to 24-year-olds volunteered within the past year, along with more than half the 25- to 33-year-olds (Hornblower 58). One Bridger put it perfectly: “We are not out to change the world, only to change the quality of life for ourselves” (Eberhardt A14). E. Dionne Jr. suggests that Bridgers have formed a synthesis between the values of the 1960s and those of the 1980s. Michael Sanchez is president of Doing Something, another group that promotes service and youth leadership. Sanchez notes that Bridgers are much more civic-minded than politically minded. He says, “While there’s an idealism, it’s less about changing the world than changing our neighborhood.” Agreed. If all concern themselves with that, the world will take care of itself.

Hence, Bridgers are learning from the tensions and solutions of the sixties that at some point altruism must compromise with practicality – a merging of ideas which also explains why Bridgers are reluctant to commit themselves to either political party. They see life through a perspective so complex that it seems chaotic to previous generations. Commitment to an ideal is never absolute; it is present, but its application must also take into consideration other commitments. What is good or evil? Depends on the situation. This is apparent in their entertainment as well. While older generations shook their heads at *Pulp Fiction* and *Seven*, Bridgers said, “Yes!” and made them hit movies. Whether it is a movie or simply a news show, Bridgers want media to reflect the reality of the world they

live in. Straightforwardness should not be mistaken for simplicity, however. When it comes to things like the news, Bridgers hate propaganda claiming to be news, or linear-plotted entertainment with its happy endings. The hit TV show *X-Files* weaves in layered story lines and leaves questions unresolved. "Generation X actively pursues the deflation of the ideal," says Karen Ritchie in her book, *Marketing to Generation X*. "No icon and certainly no commercial is safe from their [Xers'] irony, their sarcasm or their remote control (Hornblower 58).

Bridgers view Boomers as a generation which spoke in ideal terms but was unwilling to take the difficult step of actually implementing those ideals in a practical fashion. Boomers spoke of all men being created equal; many of them marched for the ideal, but most of their actions simply seem to have replaced one preferential system with another. The mongrelization of cultural traits by Xers seems to frustrate previous generations. Fragmentation and eclecticism are Gen X hallmarks. Compared to a generation ago, nearly twice as many of today's twenty somethings — 28% — agree "there is no single way to live" (Hornblower). In this cohort, blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans assert their identity more than ever. And whites are more multi-cultural. Fair-haired dreadlocks are commonplace. Fashion designers knock off urban street trends rather than the other way around. Gay rights are assumed: as the latest campus cause. Body piercing has gone mainstream. "Compared to any other generation born in this century, theirs is less cohesive, its experiences wider, its ethnicity more polyglot and its culture more splintery," write historians William Strauss and Neil Howe in their new book, *The Fourth Turning*, a study of generational change. "Today's young adults define themselves by sheer divergence" (Hornblower 58).

E. Dionne notes that the great reforming generations are the ones that marry the aspirations of service to the possibilities of politics and harness the good work done in local communities to transform a nation. My generation has that potential to be a strong bridge towards the new paradigm which Millennials are operating under.

The bottom line is that what Bridgers have learned is the tenuousness of the constructs we give authority, including the authority we give to ourselves. This is a major step in changing how we see ourselves and how we teach the next generation to see each other. If any authority could be proven to be reliable, the matter would be easier, but all have failed us. Tolerance is a word that has become both cliché and misused; humility is a more reasonable standard to hold ourselves to. What Bridgers must remember from their experience is how vulnerable our beliefs are to deconstruction. Such humility can form the foundations of our bridge to the next generation.

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# Crossing Over: How Celebrity Newsmagazines Pushed Entertainment Shows Out of Prime Time

When news correspondent Connie Chung and David Letterman both worked for NBC in the late 1980s, the comedian often used their association as a springboard for comedy. He might say something like, “Welcome to *Late Night with David Letterman* on NBC—the network that brings you ‘hard-hitting documentaries’ like *Life in the Fat Lane* and *Scared Sexless* with Connie Chung.”

That was when *infotainment* was the pejorative used to disparage the trend of news divisions to soften their reports and appeal to a larger audience. Implicit in criticisms of infotainment—a term rarely heard now that the format has become a fixture—and Letterman’s barbs at Chung was the expectation that documentaries should not be frivolous and a complaint about the blending of news and entertainment (Diamond and Mahony).

The broadcast television networks no longer produce what were called documentaries. There are occasional hour-long specials on a single topic and reports that in an earlier time would have been classified as documentary programming. But the word “documentary” has lost its cachet in network television news.

Today the news divisions have regular access to prime time through their newsmagazine series, which have become brand names: *20/20*, *Primetime*, *Dateline NBC*, *48 Hours*, and *60 Minutes*. Putting newsmagazines in prime time has been an effective programming strategy (Hall 1993, 1996; Carter 1995; Saunders 1998; Battaglio 1998). It is common for one or more of these programs to appear in weekly top-ten ratings lists, especially when competing with summer reruns.

Unlike network documentaries, newsmagazines are no longer accepted as loss leaders. Instead, they have become reliable vehicles for advertising revenue—not to mention terrific billboards for promoting the networks’ other programming and star employees. This change in the expectations for a news program took place in the 1980s. The turning point was 1987, when executives detected a formula for profitable news and an opportunity to replace marginal entertainment fare with celebrity reports. This article examines how network news crossed over and became part of regularly scheduled entertainment programming in the form of weekly celebrity newsmagazines in prime time. This piece also explains developments that preceded this transition.

### 1987—The Ratings Scorecard

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the three networks' output of documentaries was essentially what it had been in the 1970s—an average of slightly more than one program per month per network (Mascaro 1994).

A couple of years into the Reagan administration, several factors converged to alter the networks' commitment. These include deregulation championed by the Federal Communications Commission and its chairman, Mark Fowler (Mascaro 1994); relaxation of aggressive coverage of the administration by the press due to a combination of sympathy over the assassination attempt and skillful manipulation of the press by the president's staff (Hertsgaard); General William Westmoreland's high-profile libel suit against CBS over the *CBS Reports* documentary "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," as well as a general period of increased litigation against media organizations by the political right (Sanoff; Schmidt; Schneir and Schneir; Mascaro 1994); highly visible attacks by Senator Jesse Helms against CBS; and the normal shifting of news resources to cover the 1984 election, which drew money from documentary coverage.

Owing to these factors, documentary output for ABC, CBS, and NBC dropped to a three-network total of eleven in 1984—fewer than one documentary every three months for each network (Mascaro 1994). After the election, the networks changed hands and a new generation of executives ended the traditional commitment to public affairs television (Boyer 1988). News divisions were expected to contribute to profits.

The idea of news programming generating revenue was not new in the 1980s. After struggling for several years with poor ratings, *60 Minutes* eventually found a comfortable spot on Sunday evenings and became a stalwart profit center for CBS. News veterans, a costly but necessary staff who fulfilled public service mandates that enabled the entertainment division to make money, found themselves in the enviable position of being sought after by management to draw an audience in prime time.

Richard Salant, CBS News president and a reluctant early supporter of *60 Minutes*, crowed when he was asked to move the program to Sundays at 7:00 p.m. to help the entertainment division (Gates 414). Within eight years of its 1968 premier, the newsmagazine was a top-20 show and ensconced in the top 10 the next season, 1977-78 (Brooks and Marsh 1266+). Throughout its run, the CBS newsmagazine has earned the network more than one billion dollars in profits (Waite).

Other newsmagazines have been utilized by programmers to bolster their prime-time schedules. *First Tuesday*, NBC's answer in 1969 to *60 Minutes*, was the first two-hour prime-time news program. The luxury of two hours was given to the news division once each month—thus the title—to fill a hole in the schedule. NBC

had purchased a package of feature films to air on Tuesday nights, but they did not have enough to fill the entire season. The News Division was asked to cover the difference (Frank 308).

ABC's entry in the newsmagazine competition in 1978, *20/20*, presented a different temperament, compared to the traditional journalism of CBS and NBC news. Its weeknight viewers, network executives believed, wanted more entertaining information and less of a serious tone (Westin, 1982, 197).

By the mid-1980s, network documentaries had not disappeared. There were 15 in 1985 and 17 in 1986. But the standing documentary units, which previously could spend months researching and producing a single in-depth hour, were threatened.

Near the end of 1986, NBC canceled its newsmagazine, called *1986*, hosted by Roger Mudd and Connie Chung. This freed financial and human resources for other news programs, so the network announced it would air 15 documentaries in 1987. The other networks also promised to raise their outputs.

But network news executives were experimenting throughout the 1980s with hour-long programs that would be cheaper to produce and reach a larger audience. CBS sent a camera crew to cover *48 Hours on Crack Street* in 1986, the pilot for the current series. In 1987 the network also produced a two-hour special on *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, which promoted their big-name correspondents, including Dan Rather, Ed Bradley, and Diane Sawyer, as much as it did the opening of Soviet life.

At ABC, the distinguished *Close-Up* documentary unit was struggling to stay alive, as that network began airing a series of *Jennings/Koppel Reports* and single-theme magazines, containing several discrete segments related to the same topic and laced together by a prominent anchor. ABC also tried airing several three-hour documentaries, filling prime time for an entire night in an attempt to have greater impact.

NBC had the highest documentary output for 1987, at 13, which included a mix of traditional in-depth serious investigations on national defense, the airline industry, the Middle East, and juvenile crime along with several reports on American life styles: babies, Wall Street, AIDS, Catholicism, and the two subjects that seem to appeal to the most American television viewers, sex and diets (See Table, "Commercial Network Television Documentaries—1987," Mascaro 1988).

Ratings for network documentaries in 1987 demonstrated that traditional in-depth reports based on the classic documentary model could attract one-fifth of the viewers watching television and still compete with the emerging trend called "parachute journalism." Two NBC reports, one on national defense and another on juvenile crime, which were based on months of research by a documentary unit, garnered 19 and 21 percent of the audience, respectively. This compares to an

NBC program on AIDS using the parachute method, which achieved a 23 share (Mascaro 1988).

**Commercial Network Television Documentaries—1987**

	<i>Rating*/Share**</i>
<i>Scared Sexless (NBC)</i>	17.5/30
<i>Life in the Fat Lane (NBC)</i>	15.7/28
<i>Men, Women, Sex &amp; AIDS (NBC)</i>	14.0/23
<i>The Soviet Union—Seven Days in May (CBS)</i>	12.7/23
<i>20 Years on the Road with Charles Kuralt (CBS)</i>	11.9/23
<i>The Baby Business (NBC)</i>	11.3/21
<i>A Trillion for Defense: What Have We Bought? (NBC)</i>	10.6/19
<i>Crime, Punishment...and Kids (NBC)</i>	9.7/21
<i>Jennings/Koppel Report: Ronald Reagan (ABC)</i>	9.6/17
<i>Wall Street: Money, Greed and Power (NBC)</i>	9.5/17
<i>The Battle for Afghanistan (CBS)</i>	9.4/18
<i>Jennings/Koppel Report: Questions of Policy, Questions of War (ABC)</i>	9.2/16
<i>To Be a Teacher (NBC)</i>	9.2/15
<i>Alcohol &amp; Cocaine—The Secret of Addiction (ABC)</i>	8.6/17
<i>Fear, Frustration &amp; Flying (NBC)</i>	8.5/16
<i>The Blessings of Liberty (ABC)</i>	8.2/14
<i>Alcohol &amp; Cocaine—The Secret of Addiction (ABC repeat)</i>	8.0/14
<i>God Is Not Elected (NBC)</i>	7.9/15
<i>Cronkite at Large (CBS)</i>	7.7/12
<i>Judgment on the White House (CBS)</i>	7.7/11
<i>The Other Olympic Games (ABC)</i>	6.9/11
<i>Six Days Plus 20 Years: A Dream Is Dying (NBC)</i>	6.7/12
<i>The Arms, The Men &amp; the Money (NBC)</i>	6.4/11
<i>Jennings/Koppel Report: The Summit in America (ABC)</i>	6.4/10
<i>Nuclear Power—In France It Works (NBC)</i>	6.2/11
<i>They Have Souls, Too (ABC)</i>	5.9/12
<i>Catholics in America (CBS)</i>	5.6/9
<i>The In the Red Blues (CBS)</i>	5.3/10
<i>The Bomb Factories (ABC)</i>	5.3/10
<i>Children of Apartheid (CBS)</i>	5.2/9
<i>The Pope in America (ABC)</i>	5.1/19

\* The rating is the percentage of households tuned to a program from the universe of all households that have television, which in 1987-88 was 88.6 million. One point represented approximately 886,000 viewers. \*\* Based on households using television at a particular time, the share is the percentage of homes watching a particular program.

The structure for the parachute approach typically included four segments related to a single topic. Field producers would be assigned to drop in to a location, gather footage, and get out. A leading anchor would introduce the program's theme and provide the continuity. Av Westin of ABC News described the anchor as the person who would string the individual pearls together to form a necklace (Mascaro 1988).

But the ratings for 1987 also demonstrated the ability of stylish infotainment programs to entice a large audience to watch news in prime time. NBC aired two documentaries that achieved ratings equivalent to middling entertainment shows—*Life in the Fat Lane* (3 June) scored a 15.7 rating and a 28 share, and *Scared Sexless* (29 December), a 17.5 rating and a 30 share.

*Life in the Fat Lane* warned viewers about the dangers of fad diets and overeating and suggested that changes in life style would be required to reduce the risk of disease. But above all, it was a fun show that used the guitar riffs of the popular baby-boomers' song "Wipe Out" as the soundtrack for tricky editing showing bouncing bellies, shimmying thighs, and undulating butt cheeks.

Among the guests yucking it up with anchor Connie Chung were comedian Dom DeLuise, who claimed his mother could roll salami so tight you could pick your teeth with it; L.A. Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda, who confessed to his love affair with linguini; the rotund TV stars Nell Carter and Oprah Winfrey, who talked about diets; and fitness queen, movie star Jane Fonda.

The producer for the two Connie Chung programs and four other life style documentaries that year, Sid Feders, explained the success of *Life in the Fat Lane* this way: "One, it had a good subject. Everyone in this country is either fat or thinks they are. Two, it had Connie Chung, a major star who was going to bring in an audience. Three, you have the stars—Dom DeLuise, Jane Fonda, Oprah Winfrey and Nell Carter. That's the formula that I have been pushing" (Mascaro 1988).

Feders' system worked again in December with *Scared Sexless*, an even more stylized presentation. Chung appeared on set roaming among brass beds. Again the producer used accelerated montages that flashed through the tease, with fly-by images of Elvis, fast cars, and glitzy street scenes. The theme of this documentary was that the threat of sexually transmitted diseases had curtailed heterosexual America's sexual activity.

And who better to connect with baby boomers about sex than *Laugh-In*'s skinny dancer with the tattoos on her belly and bedroom eyes, Goldie Hawn. To balance the sex appeal for this show, Chung also talked to Alan Alda, who portrayed the main character on *M\*A\*S\*H*. Race car hunk Danny Sullivan and football star Marcus Allen rounded out the program and added both sex- and macho appeal.

The network documentary slate for 1987 was a scorecard for executives (See Table, "Prime-Time Entertainment Series Ratings"). The most popular long-form

documentaries were easily trumped by the phenomenal success of the stylish infotainment programs. But more important, compared to entertainment shows of that era, *Scared Sexless* equaled the number-15 series, *Amen*, just behind *Matlock* and ahead of *Monday Night Football*, *Family Ties*, *In the Heat of the Night*, *Dallas*, and *Newhart* (Brooks and Marsh). It didn't matter that long-form documentaries could attract one in five of the people watching television. A news program that could connect with an entertainment-size audience would be a gold mine of revenue, cheaper to produce, and could be staffed with expendable employees rather than truculent TV stars.

### Nurturing Prime-Time News

There were also institutional and economic factors that helped news gain a foothold in prime time. One was the availability of recognizable correspondents. After the cancellation of *1986*, Connie Chung was available, as was Jane Pauley in 1989 when she left *Today*. Diane Sawyer jumped to ABC after leaving CBS in 1989 and several magazine efforts were built around her popularity.

Linda Ellerbee, who won accolades for co-hosting the magazine *NBC News Overnight*—acknowledged as one of the best written and most intelligent news programs ever (Brown 172)—went to ABC and co-hosted *Our World*, a magazine-like documentary series that began in 1985.

### Prime-Time Entertainment Series Ratings September 1987-April 1988 (Brooks & Marsh)

<i>The Cosby Show</i> (NBC)	27.8
<i>A Different World</i> (NBC)	25.0
<i>Cheers</i> (NBC)	23.4
<i>The Golden Girls</i> (NBC)	21.8
<i>Growing Pains</i> (ABC)	21.3
<i>Who's the Boss?</i> (ABC)	21.2
<i>Night Court</i> (NBC)	20.8
<i>60 Minutes</i> (CBS)	20.6
<i>Murder, She Wrote</i> (CBS)	20.2
<i>Alf</i> (NBC)	18.8
<i>The Wonder Years</i> (ABC)	18.8
<i>Moonlighting</i> (ABC)	18.3
<i>L.A. Law</i> (NBC)	18.3
<i>Matlock</i> (NBC)	17.8
<i>Amen</i> (NBC)	17.5
<i>Scared Sexless</i> (NBC)	17.5

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<i>Monday Night Football</i> (ABC)	17.4
<i>Family Ties</i> (NBC)	17.3
<i>CBS Sunday Night Movie</i>	17.2
<i>In the Heat of the Night</i> (NBC)	17.0
<i>My Two Dads</i> (NBC)	16.9
<i>Valerie's Family</i> (NBC)	16.9
<i>Dallas</i> (CBS)	16.8
<i>NBC Sunday Night Movie</i>	16.7
<i>Head of the Class</i> (ABC)	16.7
<i>Newhart</i> (CBS)	16.5
<i>Life in the Fat Lane</i> (NBC)	15.7

Although below the top tier of popular programs, its rating approaches entertainment levels.

CBS introduced a summer magazine series in 1985, *West 57<sup>th</sup>*, a “fast-paced ‘yuppie’ version of *60 Minutes*” (Brooks and Marsh 1119). After two summers, the program made the regular schedule in 1987.

In 1988, the tabloid program *A Current Affair*, which featured titillating and gruesome stories and dramatized recreations, went into national syndication and launched a new genre of news programming (Brown 142). Soon to follow were *Inside Edition* and *Hard Copy*. The success of these programs put competitive pressure on traditional news producers to pay attention to sensational stories.

In addition to industry factors, the magazine format was malleable. Producers could blend various elements to appeal to several constituencies. One segment could deal with a sensational story without tainting the entire program. Features could also be developed in the Barbara Walters style, based on interviews with newsmakers and celebrities. (It should not be overlooked that this format lends itself to self-promotion for the stars and media products of large conglomerates that own television networks when creators appear on interview segments of the magazine.)

At NBC, Jane Pauley became the anchor of a prime-time magazine-documentary series entitled *Real Life with Jane Pauley*, July 1990 until November 1991. Brooks and Marsh write: “As if to provide counterbalance to the screaming headlines, exposés, and disasters that dominate the news, NBC launched this ‘kinder and gentler’ newsmagazine hosted by the former sweetheart of the *Today* show, Jane Pauley. Subjects ranged from [the] pedestrian (why life is so hurried; coping with the new school year) to [the] quirky (why can’t 80% of Americans program their VCRs?). A few celebrity profiles were included, but most of the reports were human interest stories or subjects likely to touch the lives of ordinary viewers” (856).

In January 1991, NBC added a tougher series: “The aptly named *Exposé* consisted almost entirely of hard-hitting revelations about real and potential scandals... Tom Brokaw was paired with one of NBC’s (and the industry’s) most successful investigative teams, Brian Ross and Ira Silverman, to dig up the dirt. Among the stories: Russian mobsters setting up shop in the United States, buying Uzi submachine guns on the streets of Florida; the Mafia muscling in on small-town garbage collection; and death squads sent to kill beggar children who harass tourists on the streets of Brazil” (Brooks and Marsh 322).

*Real Life* and *Exposé* earned mixed reviews and low ratings (Gay). *Real Life* averaged an 11.0 rating during its 1990 summer launch (*New York Times*). In June 1991 the average for the two shows was a 7.8 rating and a 15 share (Kubasik). The two programs were canceled later that year and merged into *Dateline NBC*, which premiered in March 1992. After a rocky start and controversy involving a staged truck crash fire in 1993, *Dateline NBC* finally became the first long-term, prime-time magazine success for the network, after more than a dozen attempts.

The early nineties were a heady time for network newsmagazines. At one point in August 1993, five of the top-ten-rated programs were magazines (Hall 1993). They became weekly versions of *Life in the Fat Lane* and *Scared Sexless*, earning ratings comparable to other entertainment fare. This was the new development in broadcast news that changed the traditional relationship between newsmagazines and their more respectable cousins, the network documentaries. As former NBC News president Reuven Frank explained, all news must be entertaining, otherwise no one will watch and no information will be imparted. What Frank meant, however, was that television news reporting must employ entertainment *values* to remain successful as news *programming*.

ABC capitalized on the celebrity of Diane Sawyer—who gained notoriety when she posed for a provocative cover for *Vanity Fair* in 1987—by teaming the former CBS correspondent with Sam Donaldson as hosts for *Primetime Live* in 1989, a magazine that survived early criticism for stiff, staged banter and for its *Donahue*-like interactions with a studio audience (Brooks and Marsh 838).

By the early 1990s, the prime-time schedule was dotted with newsmagazines: *60 Minutes*, *Day One*, *Dateline NBC*, *48 Hours*, *Now*, *Primetime Live*, *Eye to Eye with Connie Chung*, and *20/20*. The success of magazine programs in the early 1990s moved network news into the world of entertainment programming. What these shows replaced, however, were not documentaries, which were phased out for other reasons. The newsmagazines were substitutes for entertainment programs. It was a fundamental shift in America’s television culture.

### Setting the Stage

If we peel back another layer of television history, we can see what led up to

*Life in the Fat Lane* and *Scared Sexless*, as well as the seeds of the genre that includes series like *Dateline NBC*, *60 Minutes II*, and others. ABC and NBC managed to extend their standing documentary units longer than CBS did. *ABC Close-Up* tried the three-hour blockbusters mentioned previously. NBC blended lifestyle topics with programs on national defense, foreign affairs, and domestic policy.

Bob Rogers, who headed the documentary unit in Washington, produced several programs on life styles as a sort of barter with management to keep the unit alive, and as a vehicle for showcasing their high-priced news talent (Schwartz). The Washington unit covered marijuana, pleasure drugs, working moms, divorce, macho men, bad girls, and the singles scene. These programs were afforded the same in-depth research treatment as a treatise on foreign affairs. They were analytical and focused on broad themes. The difference was topic.

One program that is representative of this group is an *NBC Reports* documentary called "Second Thoughts on Being Single." The idea for the singles show germinated in 1982, two years before the broadcast, when assistant producer Paula Banks talked with Dr. Shirley Zussman, President of the American Council of Sex Educators, Counselors and Sex Therapists. Banks wrote in her notes:

Those who for the first time in our history have had society's permission to have premarital sex seem to be turning away from casual sex; after multiple partners it has become meaningless and non-gratifying....[F]ears have created a generation of singles who are weary of the battle, cautious of commitment and protective of themselves because they feel particularly vulnerable.... Sex has been presented un-realistically by the media ...tremendous emphasis on sexual technique.

A year passed. Rogers sent a memo to his superior, Dan O'Connor, proposing two documentaries: "Singles, the Sad Side," and "Women, Work, and Babies" (Rogers papers box 6 folder 8). Both were approved. Referring to the first title, Rogers told O'Connor, "The drastic change in male, female relationships from courtship to instant copulation, the breakdown of societies [sic] old structures for getting young males and females together have left many trapped in a limbo somewhere between singles bars, dating services, and the terror of herpes" (Rogers box 6 folder 8).

Rogers then issued a memo to his two assistant producers, Rhonda Schwartz and Paula Banks, and researcher, Arlene Weisskopf, requesting their input: "I would like each of you to give me a paragraph with your ideas on a sequence which would illustrate why it is so difficult for singles to meet suitable potential partners. Specifically, what do you see as having changed that has created the need for...the

loneliness industry. With so many more females in the workplace one would think it would be easier for women and men to meet...this is an issue we are going to have to define at some length in a [documentary] program on singles" (Rogers box 6 folder 7).

Embedded within the research notes are the various iterations of a working title, program segments, and the documentary's theme. First it was the "sex show," then the "baby boom generation," and finally the "singles show." Scores of interview notes summarize the sexual revolution, celibacy, herpes, genital warts, chlamydia, the Peter Pan theory, personal ads, and the loneliness industry (Rogers box 6).

Some interview subjects actually auditioned. Sue Atcheson, a San Francisco comedienne, sent resume, head shots, and an audiocassette with her letter to Weisskopf: "Dear Arlene, Here's the self-promotion piece you requested." Atcheson's comedy toyed with the foibles of dating and relationships. She had written a song entitled "The Dating Game Rag," which was used in the program (Rogers box 6 folders 12 and 13).

"Second Thoughts on Being Single" aired 25 April 1984, when it was reviewed by *The New York Times*: "[C]redit NBC with even raising the issue. A good deal of current political and cultural discussion chooses to ignore it. You will probably wish that the women interviewed on 'Second Thoughts on Being Single' were not so attractive; television here seems to be practicing some sexism of its own. Where are the women we see every day? Applaud the documentary, however, at least for trying."

The program earned an 11.4 rating and a 20 share, one of only three network documentaries that earned double-digit ratings that year, which included "Second Thoughts" and two programs on D-Day. What is interesting historically is the similarity between the theme in "Second Thoughts" from 1984 and *Scared Sexless* in 1987, which was basically a watered-down, stylized remake of the singles program.

*Dateline NBC*, *Real Life with Jane Pauley*, *Scared Sexless*, and *Life in the Fat Lane* are on a continuum that extends to "Second Thoughts on Being Single." But these were not the only programs, and NBC was not the only network, that flirted with using the documentary form to attract viewers and advertisers.

At CBS, Van Gordon Sauter took over the news division in 1982 and approved experiments with documentary approaches. Two programs in particular broke with CBS News tradition: *The Plane that Fell from the Sky* and *The Gift of Life*. Both of these were anchored by Bill Kurtis, who now produces investigative programming for the Arts and Entertainment Network.

*The Plane that Fell from the Sky*, broadcast 14 July 1983, tells the story of a TWA Boeing 727 that plunged from 39,000 feet to 5,000 feet before the pilots regained control of the aircraft. Sauter invited the passengers and crew to

Hollywood, where the experience was recreated on a sound stage. The guests were asked to reenact their life-threatening flight—including facial expressions—in a simulated airplane. The program got a 15.3 rating and 28 share (Mascaro 1994, 73-76). And in a marked departure from network news practices, which generally required that documentaries and news reports be produced only by in-house employees, this documentary was entrusted to freelancers, Paul and Holly Fine.

*The Gift of Life* took *CBS Reports*, and network news, into new terrain. This program celebrated organ donors. It aired 27 March 1985 and also was produced by Paul and Holly Fine. The melodramatic look and tone of this program resemble early reality TV (Mascaro 1994, 78-79). Absent from this report was any discussion or analysis about the social controversies related to organ donors, costs and benefits, or who decides who will live or die. The familiar CBS theme music dating back to Edward R. Murrow's days in the sixties with *CBS Reports*, Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, was replaced by a percussive sound track more typical of *48 Hours* or *NYPD Blue*.

Kurtis's resonant voice and intimate tone provided sound-bite captions to the visual grammar of the film in the style of *Dragnet's* Joe Friday: "The heart is installed and it beats. It's a terrifying and wonderful sight. Man bringing life...to man." The program featured quick visual cuts and jerky zooms. The credits were stylized, depicted in script and color, more like an entertainment show than a documentary, and the music shifted to a happy tone and beat as the program ended. This was no pedantic treatment. The medical information was meted out in small doses and layered between generous portions of entertaining or engaging video. Instead of confronting the viewers with a moral dilemma, this report invites viewers to be voyeurs.

Today's audience would find nothing unusual about the style and techniques of these 1980s documentary experiments. Compared with traditions formed by the producers and reporters of broadcast news, though, these developments signaled a break—their craft was on the wane. To network executives, a new television culture was dawning.

### **Evolution of the Magazine Format**

There have always been newsmagazines on television. *See It Now*, one of the most famous documentary series, was originally a newsmagazine in format, if not name. In December 1951, for instance, Murrow and producer Friendly aired segments on a Washington hearing, Korean orphans, brain research, Senator McCarthy's campaign kickoff, and a commentary by Howard K. Smith (Einstein 471).

The term caught on in 1968 after Harry Reasoner appeared in the premiere of *60 Minutes* and introduced the CBS experiment: "It's a kind of *magazine* for

television, which means it has the flexibility and diversity of a magazine adapted for broadcast journalism.” But Reasoner’s term signaled a change in style and substance more than format. Producer Don Hewitt initially borrowed Robert Drew’s gritty cinema vérité approach developed in the Kennedy years. As Drew had filmed Kennedy in his hotel room awaiting election returns in the 1960 Wisconsin primary, Hewitt filmed candidates Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon in their hotel rooms awaiting their nominations at the 1968 conventions.

The early installments also had several outright whimsical segments, including satirical animations and a recurring segment called “Digressions,” which displayed silhouettes of two figures trading mild insults. The premier shows the roots of the point-counterpoint feature, which became a familiar lampoon on *Saturday Night Live*, as well as today’s commentaries by Andy Rooney.

The original *60 Minutes* was *The New Yorker* meets *Life* magazine for television. The name “newsmagazine” stuck and has been applied retroactively to earlier news programs comprising segments of varying lengths, with an anchor or anchors providing continuity. Except for *60 Minutes*, which has settled into a steady format of three reports and a commentary, many of the current magazines are more creative, playful, interactive, and flexible in the style of the *60 Minutes* original.

For many years it was common to think of documentaries and newsmagazines as cousins, which made sense. One reason that Richard Salant of CBS News agreed to broadcast *60 Minutes* was that he needed a format that would fit between evening news and documentary. The newsmagazine was intended to cover stories that deserved more than a minute-thirty on nightly news but did not require the full hour of a documentary treatment (Mascaro 1994).

NBC’s *First Tuesday* was revised in title and time period for several years. The network tried other magazine programs in an effort to duplicate the long-running success of its CBS competitor. All failed to match *60 Minutes* until *Dateline*, which premiered in 1992, eventually struck a chord with viewers. Similarly, ABC’s *20/20* had to overcome early difficulties before it settled into a comfortable spot in prime time.

The rise of the newsmagazine occurred at the same time as a decline in the number of documentaries, beginning in the late 1960s (Carroll). Consequently we tend to see the magazine as the eventual replacement for documentaries. But as described previously, newsmagazines and documentaries had always coexisted. The two forms, though intertwined, should be viewed separately to understand the current trend.

If there is a connection today, it is between the newsmagazine series and entertainment programming. Unlike the documentaries, which were accepted as loss leaders, today’s magazine shows are expected to reach an audience and bring in ad revenue. The brand name news series are part and parcel of a network’s

programming schedule. And there is no separation between the purpose of a magazine show and the purpose of an entertainment series like *Will and Grace* or *Spin City*. It was an important shift in the evolution of the newsmagazine spawned in the 1980s, blossoming in 1987, and coming to fruition in the 1990s.

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### Notes

1. Speech given in Tokyo May 1971, p 2. Quoted in Carroll 12.

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# **Sherlock Holmes Meets Art Bell: Masters of Knowledge at the Fin-de-Siècle**

One of the key issues facing scholars of contemporary culture involves the question of knowledge, or better, popular attitudes toward the acquisition and utilization of knowledge. The issue is critical because it is enmeshed in a fundamental set of questions regarding public perceptions of truth, scientific (and social scientific) objectivity, the power and limits of the human mind, and the intersection of forms of power and knowledge. However, the question of these popular attitudes is a tricky one, as there is often little direct address of such concerns in popular culture; instead, one must often look for a more indirect reflection of these belief structures. Valuable material may be found, for example, in popular scientific discourse or in the rhetoric surrounding modern police work. I want to turn to a rather different area of analysis, though it draws upon both areas—the literal embodiment of popular beliefs regarding knowledge gathering in the figure of a single person. The two figures I will exam, fictional fin-de-siècle detective Sherlock Holmes and contemporary radio personality Art Bell would seem to be strikingly different figures, and yet they share the position of emblem for an entire set of historically specific attitudes toward the process of knowledge acquisition.

While the comparison of fictional character with real human is naturally risky, it should be noted that Bell is essentially a media construction and the product of an intense process of self-mythologization. Indeed, it may be a suitably postmodern gesture to treat Bell as a kind of fiction, given the striking similarity of his own philosophical position to that of contemporary postmodern theory, a similarity that will be discussed later in the essay. Fundamentally, I want to examine Holmes and Bell as reflective of potent fantasies about the location, acquisition, and use of forms of knowledge, with Holmes indicative of a rationalistic, hyper-modern, and supremely positivistic vision of knowledge and Bell as symptomatic of a fragmented, postmodern, and definitively paranoid view of the same terrain. To do this, I will proceed through a brief sketch of each figure, an examination of their respective milieux, an analysis of the methods deployed by each, a discussion of the connection between each and more classically academic understandings of knowledge production, and finally a brief reflection on the analysis as a whole; however, in a twist ending worthy of Holmes and with paranoia worthy of Bell, I end with an appendix which casts some doubt on the entire enterprise.

It is probably unnecessary for me to offer more than a brief identification of

Sherlock Holmes, but I will remind readers that the most famous creation of Conan Doyle made his debut in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887 and continued—with some breaks, including the false death at Reichenbach Falls—through the 1920s. Holmes was assisted, of course, by the narrator of the novels and short stories, John H. Watson. The cases collected in these works cover an enormous variety of settings, characters, and narratives, united primarily by the indefatigable pursuit of solutions by Holmes and the similarly indefatigable presence of the loyal Watson. I will say more about setting, method, and Holmes himself throughout the essay, so I will simply reaffirm Holmes' status—above Poirot, Hammer, and Encyclopedia Brown—as the world's most famous detective.

Art Bell is certainly less iconic but he is nonetheless a significant figure in contemporary popular culture. His overnight radio program "Coast to Coast AM," which deals with all manner of paranormal activities—from UFOs to zombie cults to 9/11 conspiracies—is featured on over 400 stations across North America. His website, [www.artbell.com](http://www.artbell.com), featuring everything from information on program sponsors to alleged Bigfoot photos, is approaching 100 million hits. Bell's career, like Holmes, has been marked by hiatuses and premature retirements, yet he has always returned to helm the program. He remains the most popular overnight radio personality in the U.S., and through shortwave broadcasts and the aforementioned website, enjoys a significant international presence.

### **The Capital of the Empire or a Doublewide in the Desert: Spaces and Times**

One of the immediately notable aspects in any comparison between Holmes and Bell involves the physical location associated with each. Holmes conducts his detection from the famous digs at 221B Baker Street in central London, while Bell broadcasts from his home studio located in his complex of trailers (described extensively in *The Art of Talk*) in rural Pahrump, Nevada, a desert community near Las Vegas. Each location is itself important in understanding the broader picture of popular knowledge reflected in each figure.

The turn of the century London that Holmes inhabits was, of course, the capital of the still dominant British empire (an empire referenced in Watson's service and subsequent wounding in Afghanistan) and rival to Paris and Vienna as cultural and intellectual center of the western world. As Michael Harrison argues in *The London of Sherlock Holmes*, the city was a true heterotopia (to borrow a term from Michel DeCerteau), a diverse and exciting place with a broad spectrum of neighborhoods, a vast array of restaurants and pubs, theatres and galleries, and a wide array of other establishments. Holmes is presented as possessing a phenomenal knowledge of the city, even telling Watson in *The Red-Headed League*, "it is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London." Certainly, his adventures take him to every quarter of the city, from the squalid alleys of the East End to the sumptuous

homes of the aristocracy. His wanderings outside this metropolitan space, as in the ventures to Dartmoor (*Silver Blaze*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) or his retirement to Sussex, are posed as departures to the hinterlands; there is no question that London serves as a kind of center of human activity. Even the fabled rooms on Baker Street exist as a kind of microcosmic heterotopia, as we are told that they are simultaneously the chemical lab, concert hall, and shooting range of the famous sleuth, in addition to their more traditional functions. Similarly, the city is the home of a broad array of social types, from the impoverished urchins who comprise the “Baker Street Irregulars” to the royalty Holmes occasionally serves (as in *The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor*).

Bell, as mentioned, operates from a compound in the Nevada desert, complete with a high-tech broadcast studio. The desert is a kind of anti-metropolis; as postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard points out, the desert is the space of the void, of a kind of transcendent nothingness. To say that the desert alone comprises Bell’s milieu is deceptive, though, as his real space is a set of networks—virtual, telephonic, and broadcast—that renders his concrete physical space largely irrelevant. Indeed, the fact that Bell’s rural isolation does not inhibit his status as a locus of knowledge is evidence of one of the significant distinctions between a Holmesian sensibility and the world of Bell. Bell chronicles extensive personal travels in his autobiography—evidence, perhaps, of a cultured and cosmopolitan figure—but these are largely tangential to his primary venture. Indeed, part of the appeal of Bell is his status as a trailer-dwelling desert recluse, acting as a kind of symbolic nexus rather than a flesh individual. Unlike Holmes, who is constantly boarding a train, hailing a cab, or striding energetically through a thriving metropolis, Bell acts a kind of antenna, pulling the signals into his isolated trailer and processing them and thus also acting as his own information technology.

Of course, the status of London as the center of an empire is an historically specific one, so it is appropriate to examine the other half of a milieu, the temporal situation of each figure. Bell and Holmes share a position as figures at the fin-de-siècle (different “siècles,” obviously) and also reflect the dawn of respective eras. Holmes, who concludes his career shortly after World War I, stands at the final glory years of the British empire and the dawn of the horrific carnage of two great wars; in this sense, he operates within the last moments of a kind of European world domination and enlightenment enthusiasm, one that will be tested and dialectically complemented with genocide, environmental destruction, and the eventual dominance of the rogue colony referenced in *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear*. In this sense, Holmes is a figure reflective of a moral and methodological sensibility which is increasingly threatened by a world which reflects a more complex, indeed dialectical variant of modernity.

Bell, on the other hand, operates within the era of “millennial panic,” as Arthur

Kroker would describe it (7), one in which the West is firmly entrenched within an “information age” and one in which the qualities associated with modernity—instability, mechanization, networking—have metastasized with an unimaginable intensity, and popular sentiment regarding science, technology, and the future is riddled with anxiety, dread and a kind of vertiginous enchantment. Clearly, a new kind of “information master” is required by this setting, one that is not bound to the “obsolete” dictums of a traditional modernist orientation to scientific rationality and linear thought. The following examination of how these figures operate within these respective milieux may bring out this shift with greater clarity.

### **The Attic and the Network, or Two Kinds of Abduction: Methods**

The title of this section refers to the structure of mind characteristic of Holmes and Bell, respectively, with each figure offering a very different method for uncovering the truth, and especially the truth regarding an unsavory or spectacular event or phenomenon. Holmes himself suggests the image of the attic for his mind not long after meeting Watson, telling him that a man’s mind should contain “nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order” (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* 12). While Watson is alarmed at Holmes’ ignorance regarding a number of important contemporary issues, Holmes prefers absolute expertise in the relevant areas; in this sense he is a quintessential specialist. Indeed, across the whole of the span of the Holmesian canon, we are told that Holmes has authored works on tobacco ashes, tattoos, typewriters, the “dating of manuscripts,” and numerous other topics, in addition to general works on detection and scientific method. His intellectual life is significant here because it gives Holmes a scholarly credibility that matches his physical exuberance and dogged determination. That determination is displayed over and over again in the canon; there are physical battles with villains, intellectual matches with more clever criminals, and a continual reinforcement of the theme that science in the service of order will defeat even the wildest and most nefarious of characters. Indeed, Holmes’ great weakness, cocaine, is presented as a cheap substitute for the mental stimulation that detection provides; not as an escape from reality as much as a holding pattern between cases. Holmes’ rational and orderly approach to solving crimes is often referred to as “deduction,” both by Holmes within the tales themselves as well as by numerous commentators; however, as Umiker-Sebeok and Sebeok point out, the actual technical-philosophical term, at least within the semiotic system constructed by C.S. Peirce, is “abduction” which creates a linguistic if not methodological link to Bell.

Bell’s mind, at least as it is displayed on his website, in his books, and most prominently on his radio program, is not an attic or a compartment or any conventional space at all. Instead, as noted, it might be better envisioned as a

network, one capable of receiving and transmitting information. Like Holmes, Bell relies on a vast array of informants, and also like Holmes, these figures come from all manner of social and intellectual backgrounds, running the gamut from reputable scientists to utterly marginal conspiracy theorists, UFO buffs, and “experts” on such topics as demonic possession and extrasensory perception. Bell, though, never leaves his home (or trailer) to draw upon this collective wisdom, nor is there a need for personal visits to Pahrump—no ringing of the bell that so often signaled a new mystery at 221B Baker Street. Instead, satellite linkups, conventional phone and postal lines, and computer networks supply Bell with the material for his investigations of the paranormal. Indeed, one trademark of Bell’s hosting style is his noncommittal prodding of his guests and his relative lack of judgment over their often bizarre “arguments.” Like a psychoanalyst, Bell lets his clients talk and talk and talk, putting the listener in the position of adjudicating their claims. Rather than the Holmesian vision of man as processing machine, Bell suggests man as a kind of end-to-end network, one in which there is no alteration of the information that is transmitted, only a movement from one mechanism to another. The only real theme that links the diverse content of Bell’s program is the sense that the information being offered is hidden or obscured from public view, usually though not always in the service of an institution or individual with some political, economic, or social power. Directly contra Holmes and his modernist rationality, Bell’s program provides a vision of knowledge more consonant with a postmodern skepticism—no methodological prudence, a highly subjective, pluralistic understanding of “the truth,” and a faith that knowledge is often to be found where it is least expected.

### **The Theory Connection: Bell and Holmes Reflecting Philosophy**

As the last point suggests, there is an intriguing connection between both Holmes and Bell and the respective intellectual milieus that accompanies the creation of their work. This is evidence of their status as reflective of a specific cultural context, of course, but also implies an unusually intellectual character to each. Holmes’ method, as noted, has been extensively compared to the work of philosopher-semiotician C.S. Peirce, who was a contemporary of Conan Doyle and a key figure in the development of a systematic semiotic theory. This connection is perhaps unsurprising given Peirce’s relentless emphasis on methods of thought—Holmes, with a little prodding from Watson, would often provide his own lectures on methods of detection. However, in the secondary literature on the Holmesian canon, the detective is linked with a variety of other figures and movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: the philosophy of Carlyle (Jones), Locke (Page), and Leibniz (Crawford); the broader movements of deism (Pearson), existentialism (Page), positivism (Solberg) and scientific atheism (King); and the aforementioned (and

historically contemporary) psychoanalytic movement. Some of these connections, which are obviously quite diverse, can be explained by the breadth and diversity of the canon itself, with its wide ranging collection of characters, settings, and plots. However, what all of these philosophical, scientific, and theological positions share is a deeply modern character, modern in the sense that they place observation, experience, and material facts in a superior position and are reliant on the devaluation of custom, superstition, unjustified authority (human and supernatural), and the mystical. Some of this might be explained by Conan Doyle's other career as a medical doctor and his presumed modeling of Holmes after Dr. Joseph Bell, a surgery professor of Doyle's (see Hall 76-87); in the final section of the essay, this will be discounted as entirely plausible. For the moment, I will merely reiterate the status of Holmes as a kind ultra-modern figure.

Bell, contrarily, might be understood as an ultra-postmodern figure, a description that is evident in the juxtaposition of his work with that of a number of postmodern philosophers. Firstly, this is true at a thematic level, with Bell's constant attention to the covert, the paranormal, and the hidden mirroring the obsessions of a number of postmodernists, particularly the aforementioned Kroker, but also Virilio, Serres, and Deleuze; the work of the latter is also echoed by Bell's use of an unconventional, arguably "rhizomatic" network to provide information for his program. Additionally, the skepticism regarding official sources of information (and sanctioned methods of information gathering) suggests the work of Lyotard, whose own skepticism regarding the meta-narratives of western culture was a foundational element in the postmodern school. As with Holmes, Bell is a figure of such cultural complexity that a single philosophical correlate is difficult to locate, and one can discover a similarly varied selection of cohorts for Bell.

However, as with the Holmes-Peirce connection, there is one particularly notable parallel figure, one with a metaphysical as well as thematic connection. Bell's 1997 book *The Quickening*, which argues that we inhabit a world marked by the titular condition, one in which viral diseases, environmental destruction, computer systems failures, and other natural and technological calamities will emerge at an ever increasing rate, bears a remarkable similarity to the recent work of renowned French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard. In *The Illusion of the End*, *The Perfect Crime*, *The Transparency of Evil*, and several other works, Baudrillard makes a case for precisely the same phenomenon, in similarly apocalyptic if more literarily engaging terms. Indeed, the contrast between Peirce (among others) to Baudrillard as properly philosophical correlates for Holmes to Bell may tell us more than any deep textual analysis regarding the cultural significance of these two figures; it also suggests an intriguing philosophical depth to these two popular cultural icons.

**Masters of Knowledge: Bell and Holmes as Symptom**

In this section, I will try to offer some concluding thoughts regarding the status of Holmes and Bell as cultural figures and as exemplars of an attitude toward the generation and circulation of social information. I refer to the two as “masters of knowledge” in the sense that they serve as symbols for a much larger set of practices of collecting, storing, and processing information and even as near-heroic figures in the struggle for truth. As noted, the Holmesian vision of truth is one consonant with the scientific method, logical abduction, and an almost clinical emotional divestment, while Bell’s program implies that it is precisely this set of conventions that inhibits and obscures the hunt for truth and that the truth exists in the shifting, fragmentary, and covert networks of information. More than this clear distinction, though, both figures reflect a kind of epochal shift in public faith regarding the infallibility of human rationality and the appropriate source of knowledge. Of course, this necessarily raises the much wider question of whether this should thus be regarded as a paradigmatic shift from the modern to the postmodern, one with implications far beyond individual instances of popular culture.

I suppose one can take a Holmesian approach to the question and expand the study until a valid conclusion can be drawn as to the relation of this symptom (or instance) to the whole. On the other hand, a more apocalyptic, Bellian perspective would regard the individual instance of Bell’s knowledge world as a kind of structural homology to a larger world marked by instability, cover-up, and the ride on a UFO. In that sense, it seems that we would be forced to choose between two forms of abduction. However, perhaps the real answer is that Holmes and Bell are, in the final instance, both products of an intellectual social environment and important figures in the popular dissemination of certain attitudes toward the process of knowledge collection. Ultimately, perhaps, they reflect a kind of metaphysical mood regarding the status of scientific rigor and the rationality of human understanding. Of course, such relationships are necessarily complex and often contradictory, and the latter is reflected in the conclusion below.

**Twist Ending/Counterpoint: Conan Doyle as Mystic, Bell as Rationalist**

As promised in the introduction, I will conclude this essay with a sort of twist ending in which I offer some reservations regarding the claims made in the previous sections. These reservations are derived from a closer look at the creators of both Holmes and “Art Bell,” one that nearly reverses the portrait provided above. As I hinted, Arthur Conan Doyle was far from Holmesian in his own philosophical orientation, becoming a major authority in the area of spiritualism, the belief that it was possible to communicate with the dead. Indeed, Doyle was a major supporter of the Society for Psychical Research (breaking with them over their lack of credulity

regarding certain phenomena—see Hitchens 279), lectured on the supernatural in a number of countries, wrote extensively on such concerns in the period 1900-1930, and thus became a particularly prominent spokesperson for the Spiritualist movement. Strikingly, Doyle was even involved in the public presentation of “spirit photographs,” which offered images of ghosts and other apparitions; one can find precisely the same content displayed at the [www.artbell.com](http://www.artbell.com) website, suggesting that the distance between Bell and the creator of Holmes may be considerably smaller than that between Doyle and his creation. Doyle’s intellectual interests in the paranormal were greeted with a response not unlike that of the scientific community to Bell. In the words of one critic from the era, Doyle displays a “puerile (or is it senile) credulity... a curious combination of personal vanity and provincial prepossession;” intriguingly, the same critic enlists both Doyle’s creation Holmes and Dr. Freud in his battle against Doyle’s mysticism (Jastrow 2-3). This certainly raises questions regarding the modernist character of Holmes and puts at least his creator closer to Bell than might be expected.

Or would it? While the symbolic world posed by Bell’s radio program and his books certainly exhibits the signs of a postmodern irrationality, there is evidence that this is partly illusion. Careful listening to Bell reveals a kind of blank-faced dubiousness on the part of the host; certainly, Bell rarely endorses the views of his guests and callers (and especially the more extreme/fringe views offered by both) and holds to a standard of objectivity that looks almost quaintly modern. Indeed, for a time Bell’s website featured an interactive “credibility meter” which allowed listeners to rate the believability of guests on the program, which certainly acknowledges resistance to many of the claims presented by these “experts” (though, sadly, this feature has been discontinued). Recently, I happened to meet Dr. Seth Shostak, public programs scientist at the SETI institute, an organization dedicated to the search for extraterrestrial life, and a very frequent guest on Bell’s show; Shostak confirmed that Bell exhibits a great deal of caution in relation to the fantastic and often paranoid views of many of his guests. In fact, Shostak himself often appears as a kind of “rational” counterpoint to other, less scientifically reputable informants, suggesting that Bell may be more committed to a rather mundane sense of balance that is at odds with the more outré aspects of the program. While this certainly does not negate the broader impression left by Bell’s oeuvre—and is explicitly contradicted by the tone of *The Quickening* and Bell’s other “scientific” work, *The Coming Global Superstorm* (co-authored with fellow radio host Whitley Streiber)—it does suggest that like Doyle/Holmes, Bell is a far from univocal figure.

Where does this leave my examination of these two iconic figures? Rather than an outright negation, as noted, of the early analysis, I think it suggests a complexity inherent in any figure as culturally rich as Holmes or Bell, that contradictory strands of meaning are inevitably woven together in these characters.

Perhaps this is also reflective of a broader set of public tensions: the struggle between scientific trust and mystical/religious faith; the sense that knowledge is obtained through a orderly process and the view that it is continually shifting, elusive, and often willfully obscured; the need for a pervasive skepticism and the desire to believe virtually anything; finally, the desire to arrive at the truth via the method of abduction and the desire to experience an abduction and receive the truth thanks to an alien interlocutor. Perhaps, a realization of these striking and resilient tensions is the ultimate conclusion that emerges from a comparison of the two figures. Not a properly Holmesian resolution nor a Bellian mystical epiphany, necessarily, but a starting point for a better understanding of the complex intersection of popular culture, scientific (and pseudo-scientific) knowledge, and the final location of “the truth.”

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### Notes

1. Of course, this question is the basis of much of the oeuvre of Michel Foucault.
2. See, for example, his autobiography *The Art of Talk*.
3. The most famous involved a horrifying tragedy in which his son was kidnapped and raped by a neighbour.
4. Interestingly, Doyle received his knighthood for his own service to the empire in support of the Boer War.
5. Harrison points out that there were 50,000 more licensed establishments in 1900 than in 1972 (40).
6. Conan Doyle's enthusiasm for the supernatural will be discussed near the end of the paper, but it is worth noting that his interest in such un-Holmesian material is sometimes explained by the loss of family members in World War I (see Hitchens 278).
7. The non-judgemental and relatively anonymous character of the end-to-end network was a key virtue of the Internet and often thought to be critical to the impact of this new medium (see Lessig 12).
8. This is the premise, of course, of the most famous Holmes pastiche, Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven Per Cent Solution*, in which Holmes battles his cocaine addiction with the help of Sigmund Freud.
9. The rhizome is the key figure for the scattered and free-ranging symbolic character of the postmodern in Deleuze's most famous works, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, both co-written with Felix Guattari.
10. Interestingly, the violently negative reviews of Bell's book within the scientific community mirror the similarly vituperative treatment by Baudrillard by many sectors of contemporary philosophy and social criticism.
11. See Meikle, “‘Over There’: Arthur Conan Doyle and Spiritualism.”

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# **Buffy the Vampire Disciplinarian: Institutional Excess and the New Economy of Power**

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS)*, the hit television series featuring a teen-age girl with super-human powers who fights vampires and other forces of evil, has inspired increasing critical attention over the last few years. This attention is largely focused on three propositions: Buffy represents a liberatory feminist figure (Wilcox; Harts); the show's vampires and demons represent the failure of reason, science, and technology to solve contemporary social problems (Owen); and the show offers a moderately Marxist critique of culture (McMillan and Owen). Implicit in each of these propositions is the notion that, in her struggle against vampires and demons, Buffy subverts concrete and often callous political, social, economic, and educational institutions. Throughout the first four seasons, for example, Buffy struggles against the institutional powers embodied in the high school, the mystical Watcher's Council, and the military-industrial complex called The Initiative. This apparently subversive project seems to have been extended in the spin-off series *Angel*, in which the title character, a vampire cursed with a soul, helps those in need while struggling against the sinister law firm Wolfram and Hart.

However, more recent critics, such as Kent Ono, have begun to perform resistant readings which suggest the show is not as subversive as it appears. While Ono focuses on the show's representations of race, this essay argues that the show's representations of institutional power are also less transgressive than they seem. Rather than simply exposing the evils of institutions, a project which might seem in line with Foucault's study of punitive systems in *Discipline and Punish*, both *BtVS* and *Angel* actually offer an alternative system of power and control which is, as Foucault describes the modern penal system, "more regular, more effective, more constant and more detailed in its effects" (80). Therefore, these apparent subversions of institutional power merely signal a resistance to the excessive use of power, to outdated institutional models rather than to institutional power in general. In other words, while these programs may be read as supporting Marxist or feminist subversions of institutional constructions, they ultimately reaffirm the role of institutions in maintaining social order.

From the very first episode of *BtVS*, "Welcome to the Hellmouth," the series establishes a pattern in which institutions are shown to be inefficient, inadequate, and misguided in their efforts to maintain order. The premise of the episode is that Buffy Summers has moved to a new high school in Sunnydale, California, after

setting fire to her old school in L.A. due to a vampire infestation which only she was able to recognize. Buffy is eager to put her slaying days behind her, but unfortunately her new school turns out to be located over a "Hellmouth," a portal which a vampire known as "The Master" is attempting to open in order to destroy the world. Buffy is forced to accept her identity as a slayer and save the world from certain destruction, while at the same time negotiating obstacles placed before her by the educational institution. For example, by attempting to stop Buffy from leaving campus, the school's principal not only misjudges her character but also inadvertently puts the world in mortal jeopardy, and only by "rebellious" against the system and its preconceptions can Buffy succeed in resolving the crisis. Over the course of the first four seasons, this pattern becomes even more pronounced in episodes such as "Graduation Day, Part One," in which the Watcher's Council, an institution ostensibly created to help Buffy slay vampires and demons, becomes an obstacle that Buffy has to overcome in averting a catastrophe at Sunnydale's graduation ceremony. In the fourth season, the military institution called The Initiative becomes the very crisis Buffy has to resolve during her first year of college: its experiments in biological warfare result in the creation of a cyborg demon named "Adam" who threatens to annihilate the entire human race. Buffy's resistance to institutional authority thus becomes almost indistinguishable from her role as the vampire slayer.

*BtVS* also seems to depict these institutions as Foucaultian models of discipline and punishment, emphasizing surveillance, categorization, and regulation of behavior. For example, the high school principal repeatedly warns Buffy and her friends, "I have my eye on you," and the Council's mechanism of control takes the form of the "Watcher," an individual whose sole purpose is to monitor the activities of the slayer. The use of surveillance is most obvious in The Initiative, which has hidden video cameras throughout the campus of Sunnydale University. The Initiative also employs an elaborate system of ordering and classifying demons according to their behavior and anatomy. This is similar to the Watcher's Council, which possesses extensive knowledge of vampires and demons, and the high school principal performs a similar procedure by dividing students into discrete categories of troublemakers. (Buffy and her friends seem to occupy their own particular sub-category.) These institutions regulate the behavior of their subjects through the use of routines and restrictions, such as those employed by the high school, and the Watcher's Council similarly attempts to control Buffy by discouraging her from dating, training her, and ultimately putting her through a series of brutal tests. The scientists who run The Initiative control the demons they capture by keeping them in holding cells, using drugs and computer implants to regulate their behavior as well as the behavior of their own soldiers. These similarities seem to support Foucault's equation of all institutions of power, such as "factories, schools, barracks,

[and] hospitals,” with prisons (228), and *BtVS* thus suggests a resistance to these institutions.

*BtVS* also seems to critique institutions in its depiction of Buffy as a heroine who is independent of the justice system. Those within institutions view Buffy as a marginal element, a criminal operating outside the system, and she is repeatedly chastised by authority figures. For example, in “Becoming, Part Two,” at the end of the second season, Buffy is expelled by the principal, who repeatedly states that she is a subversive element within the high school. In a similar way, when she refuses to obey the Council’s orders in “Graduation Day, Part One,” Wesley, the Council’s representative, accuses her of “mutiny.” Likewise, in the fourth season episode “The I in Team,” Professor Walsh, the leader of The Initiative, tries to have Buffy murdered, ostensibly because her behavior is unpredictable and endangering The Initiative’s project. Colonel McNamara, who takes over the Initiative after Walsh’s death, even labels her an “anarchist” (“New Moon Rising”). The idea of the hero operating outside accepted institutions is extended in the spin-off series *Angel*, in which Lindsay, the devious Wolfram and Hart lawyer, convinces a police detective that Angel is “a being...who feels he is above the law” (“Sanctuary”).

The notion that Buffy subverts modern institutions has also been fueled by claims that the show’s vampires and demons represent social problems that contemporary institutions can neither recognize nor control. For example, A. Susan Owen argues that “each episode negotiates the claims of a rational world view in the context of social fragmentation and institutional failure” (27). Owen illustrates this point with the episode “Ted,” in which Buffy is abused by her mother’s boyfriend, who turns out to be a cyborg; the failure of social institutions to solve the very real problem of domestic abuse, Owen argues, is further represented by the once again misdirected efforts of the police. Owen concludes that “in Sunnydale the threat is inherent within the culture: reason, science and social order fail in the face of predation, because predation is part of the modern project. In this narrative, vampirism is the inverted human face of power and domination” (28).

However, Owen fails to account for the ways in which vampires themselves are also subject to forces of power and domination. This domination can take the form of a gypsy curse, which can change a vampire into a force for good, or the excessive institutional power of The Initiative and its programs of behavior modification and experimentation. Although it is true that vampires are floating signifiers that can symbolize a number of social issues, such as alcohol abuse and premarital sex, they more frequently represent people who are subject to a variety of institutional pressures. As Ono points out, their supernatural nature is often coded as racial difference: “the marginalization of vampires on the show takes the place of racial marginalization in the world outside the show” (172). However, in

various situations, their predatory behavior is also coded as criminal, and the fact that they exist outside normal systems of economic exchange and “feed off the living” often codes them as lower-class citizens or even parasitical welfare recipients. Therefore, rather than simply representing abstract ideas, such as the failure of reason, science, and social order, or as a problem that must be completely eliminated, vampires and demons—creatures without souls—represent figures who are truly marginalized by society and supposedly in need of discipline.

This relationship between vampires and discipline is particularly appropriate given that, according to Foucault, the exercise of disciplinary power is directly linked to the notion of the soul. Foucault argues that the soul is produced in the act of punishment, and thus the history of the creation of the modern institutional apparatus is also a “history of the modern soul”: “[The soul] is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint” (29). In other words, the notion of a soul is inherently connected with forces of control, and rather than simply “slaying” the soulless, as her job title suggests, Buffy’s exercise of disciplinary power actually rehearses the process by which souls are produced and sustained. This connection between discipline and the soul is most explicit in the character of Angel. In an inversion of the traditional Faust myth, Angel is punished for his evil deeds by being given back a soul, which causes him to experience torment and guilt. His punishment and his soul are thus inseparable, and for as long as he retains his soul, he continues to be punished.

Therefore, rather than critiquing Foucaultian institutions, *BtVS* actually demonstrates the uses of power which Foucault describes as essential to modern penal systems. For example, unlike the medieval torture scene Foucault describes in “The Spectacle of the Scaffold,” Buffy and Angel’s methods of punishment are not linked to economic and political status. They are not representatives of a monarchical or governmental power, but rather justice itself, otherwise known as the seemingly benevolent “Powers That Be” (PTB). The objective of this system of justice is, as Foucault argues for the modern penal system, “to make of the punishment and repression of illegalities a regular function, coextensive with society; not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body” (82). Rather than performing the function of the executioner, Buffy and Angel live within society, integrating their roles as punishers into their everyday lives.

Buffy and Angel can also be distinguished from executioners by the fact that their punishments are more “humane.” Unlike executioners, who perform a spectacle of torture in front of a crowd to deter future crimes, Buffy and Angel’s tactics do not rely on terror, shock, and physical horror, but rather they are depicted as measured, merciful, and appropriate to the crime. In the chapter “The Gentle

Way in Punishment,” Foucault describes the efforts of reformers to suit the punishment very directly to the crime: “The ideal punishment would be transparent to the crime that it punishes; thus for him who contemplates it, it will be infallibly the sign of the crime that it punishes” (105). Buffy does not simply slay all vampires and demons; rather, she establishes a set of penalties for certain infringements that vary from the most extreme (death to vampires who feed on the living) to the relatively mild and necessary (werewolves must be locked up during a full moon). This is even more evident with Angel, who offers to help both humans and demons depending on who is being victimized by whom at any given time. For example, in the episode “She,” Angel assists a woman fleeing oppression in another dimension even though she has already murdered at least one human; his aid is contingent on her refraining from any further killing: “I’m not saying you shouldn’t fight. Just know I’ll be there to stop you if you cross the line.”

Foucault also stresses the importance of categorization to the ideal penal system: “For penal semiotics to cover the whole field of illegalities that one wishes to eliminate, all offences must be defined; they must be classified and collected into species from which none of them can escape” (98). In contrast to the institutions of the Council and The Initiative, both of which fail to recognize the “individuality” of the creatures they confront, Buffy and Angel are able to differentiate between groups of vampires and demons, and they pay close attention to their various backgrounds and motives. For example, The Initiative trains its soldiers to refer to vampires and demons as “Hostile Subterrestrials,” or simply “HSTs,” and they are taught to view these beings as animals which all possess an equal degree of evil. This failure to differentiate becomes a major source of conflict in the episode “New Moon Rising,” where Buffy and her boyfriend Riley, a member of The Initiative, argue about the justice of putting all demons into a single category:

Buffy: You sounded like Mr. Initiative: demons bad, people good.

Riley: Something wrong with that theorem?

Buffy: There’s different degrees of...

Riley: Evil?

Buffy: It’s just different with different demons. There are creatures, vampires for example, who aren’t evil at all.

Riley: Name one.

Buffy’s defense of Oz, a friend who is a werewolf, echoes Foucault’s description of “the delinquent whose slow formation is shown in a biographical investigation” and who should be distinguished from the offender “in that he is not only the author of his acts...but is linked to his offense by a whole bundle of complex threads (instincts, drives, tendencies, character)” (252). Buffy similarly claims that

“Oz is not dangerous” and that “something happened to him that wasn’t his fault.” Riley’s refusal to consider biography when thinking of HSTs even prompts Buffy to call him a “bigot,” but by the end of the episode Riley has learned his lesson: “I was in a total black-and-white space—people versus monsters—and it ain’t like that, especially when it comes to love.” This point is particularly relevant to Buffy’s own past romance with Angel, the vampire with a soul, and her ability to judge each individual creature according to his/her own personal history repeatedly puts her at odds with the institutions she encounters. For example, Buffy’s decision to leave the Council is a direct result of their refusal to help Angel after he is poisoned by the rogue slayer Faith (“Graduation Day, Part One”); the Council’s inability to consider Angel’s unique history and its decision to condemn him outright as a vampire convinces Buffy that she would be more effective on her own.

Because of his experiences, Angel is keenly aware of the impact of personal history and the importance of making distinctions between individuals. In the episode “Sanctuary,” Angel is the only one to defend Faith when she is being hunted down by Buffy, the Council, the police, and the Wolfram and Hart law firm. Wesley, who has recently been brutally tortured by Faith, tries to convince Angel that she deserves to be punished for her actions, and he follows a logic similar to The Initiative’s in overlooking her history and interpreting her motives as simply animalistic instinct:

Wesley: There are far more humane ways to deal with a rabid animal.

Angel: She’s not an animal.

Wesley: No?

Angel: She’s a person, and in case you’ve forgotten, we’re not in the business of giving up on people.

Wesley: I believe in helping people. I do not believe in coddling murderers... There is evil in that girl... If you set her free, she’ll kill again.

Angel: You can’t just arbitrarily decide whose souls are worth saving and whose aren’t.

Angel’s defense of Faith is clearly based on the idea that one must use knowledge of the individual criminal’s background in order to devise a sentence appropriate to the crime. While this episode seems to mimic the dialogue between Buffy and Riley, a similarity heightened by the fact that both episodes originally aired on the same night, it is ironic that Buffy makes a special appearance in this episode of *Angel* in which she also condemns Faith as a monster who cannot be reformed. Faced with the excessive assault of the Council’s hit squad, however, Buffy reconsiders her personal vendetta against Faith and helps in her rescue, a decision which is ultimately affirmed by Faith’s confession to the police and which

emphasizes yet again the importance of employing a measured punishment that considers the offender's background.

Such intimate knowledge of the differences between individual vampires and demons allows Buffy to employ certain demons for her own ends. In his discussion of the delinquent, Foucault adds that "prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offenses, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection" (272). This is illustrated in several episodes of *BtVS*, such as "Enemies," in which Buffy is able to use Angel and his known status as a delinquent in order to gain Faith's confidence and learn the mayor's evil plans; Buffy is able to incorporate Angel's past transgressions into a "general tactics of subjection" by asking him to masquerade in the guise of his formerly evil self. Buffy is also aware of a local bar frequented by vampires and demons, but rather than killing them she allows the bar to stay open and often uses it to get information on demon activity.

Perhaps the clearest example of Buffy's strategic use of delinquents is her relationship with Spike, a vampire who was formerly her archenemy. Near the end of the second season, Spike begins an association with Buffy and her friends in which their interests frequently coincide; for example, in that season's finale, "Becoming, Part Two," Spike even helps them save the world. In the fourth season, Spike falls prey to The Initiative, who install a chip in his brain that prevents him from physically harming humans and makes him even more useful as an ally. While The Initiative wants to keep Spike incarcerated, Buffy allows him his liberty for as long as he proves useful in gaining her objectives. Spike does not become good; rather, Buffy's knowledge of both his powerlessness and his greed allows her to use him in productive ways. For example, in "Doomed," Spike helps Buffy defeat three demons seeking to reopen the Hellmouth under the high school. Giles similarly pays Spike to help him during the episode "A New Man," in which he is transformed into a demon and hunted by The Initiative. The employment of Spike in these moments represents a much more efficient use of disciplinary power than that of The Initiative or the Council, who would simply kill or incarcerate him.

Foucault's chapter on Bentham's Panopticon is often cited as the most crucial part of his study of disciplinary models, and the similarities between Bentham's model and the methods employed by Buffy and her allies are striking. As we have already pointed out, The Initiative and the Council appear to fulfill Bentham's dream of a disciplinary regime grounded in the principle of surveillance. For example, the architectural design of The Initiative's underground complex, which holds demons in individual cells with transparent walls facing a central hallway, seems to replicate Bentham's Panopticon: "Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the

side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions” (200). Likewise, the use of video cameras in the demons’ holding cells ensures that each prisoner is “seen, but he does not see” (200). This surveillance is extended throughout the university through frequent camouflaged patrols and monitoring devices concealed within each building. However, a closer reading of the show’s juxtaposition of Buffy’s methods of tracking and subduing vampires and demons with the methods used by The Initiative reveals that Buffy and her friends employ a system of surveillance which more closely resembles the panoptic gaze elaborated by Foucault. Like The Initiative, Buffy and her friends employ patrols; however, their patrols are even more invisible than the Initiative’s, whose gun-toting soldiers, fully decked out in green combat fatigues, are almost comically obvious.

Buffy’s use of surveillance is also more efficient than The Initiative’s because of its disassociation from architectural structures. Buffy’s system actually illustrates “the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power so to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action” (201). In other words, Buffy’s power is not restricted to the prison environment, but rather diffused throughout society; demons are aware that the slayer exists and thus, like the panoptic tower, the slayer represents an observer who may or may not be watching but whose position nevertheless continually exerts influence. The Initiative, on the other hand, is a secret institution that depends on the actual performance of punishment to exert its influence; thus, unlike Bentham’s model, it fails to overcome its architectural and material constraints. According to Foucault, Bentham was even “surprised that panoptic institutions could be so light: there were no more bars, no more chains, no more heavy locks” (202). By embodying the ever-present potential of surveillance and punishment, Buffy offers a far more accurate representation of the lightness of this disciplinary model.

The Watcher’s Council seems to provide another model of this kind of disembodied surveillance. As its title suggests, the Council is designed primarily to watch the activities of vampires and demons, as well as the slayer herself, and there is no suggestion that the Council possesses a prison or even a central headquarters. Like Buffy and her friends, the Council also seems to have much more knowledge about demons than The Initiative. However, rather than representing the evolution of punishment towards the Panopticon, the Council seems to be modeled on the sovereign’s use of disciplinary power. Not only do the trappings of the Council mimic medieval society, a fact emphasized by their British, “Old World” origins, but the Council also seems to employ Buffy as an executioner whose only role is to follow orders and slay without question. According to Foucault, the executioner is the sovereign’s representative in a symbolic ritual of power in

which the criminal's act against the sovereignty is revenged; in punishing a crime, therefore, "the intervention of the sovereign is not...an arbitration between two adversaries:...it is a direct reply to the person who has offended him" (47-48). In a similar way, the Council does not seem to be concerned simply with punishing those who break the law, but rather they treat all transgressions as direct affronts to their authority. In condemning Angel, for example, the Council reveals that it is more concerned with preserving its own codes than it is with justice, or, as Wesley tells Buffy, "It's not Council policy to cure vampires" ("Graduation Day, Part One"). This emphasis on preserving authority is even more pronounced when the transgression is committed by one of the Council's own members. For example, Wesley refers to Buffy's desire to help Angel as "mutiny," a term which seems highly extreme, and in the episode "Who Are You," where Faith is chased for committing murder, the Council's retrieval team says to her, "The Watcher's Council used to mean something. You perverted it." This accusation is shown to be doubly misplaced in that it not only reveals the Council's megalomania but also their ineptitude; due to a magical device, Faith has switched bodies with Buffy, and the Council's policy of following orders without question allows them to capture and accuse the wrong person. This episode also depicts the Council's brutality: rather than returning Faith to the U.K. for trial, the Council orders her immediate execution, and thus Faith's eventual confession to the police in "Sanctuary" depicts the legal system as a much more civilized and modern institution. (The legal system is rarely shown in such a positive light in the series; it is only in contrast to the primitive extremism of the Council that this is possible.) The Council applies the same extreme measures to all vampires and demons, measures that bear a striking similarity to what Foucault describes as the "limit of punishment": "The dissymmetry, the irreversible imbalance of forces were an essential element in the public execution. A body effaced, reduced to dust and thrown to the winds, a body destroyed piece by piece by the infinite power of the sovereign constituted not only the ideal, but the real limit of punishment" (50). The show's use of special effects to make the vampires explode into dust whenever they are killed would seem to be the most perfect illustration of this limit, and the Council's blanket use of this extreme form of punishment shows its medieval nature. By rejecting the Council, Buffy also rejects this excessive use of force.

But perhaps the clearest way in which *BtVS* illustrates Foucault's model of discipline and punishment is in the notion of the slayer itself. As the prologue to the show's early episodes states, the slayer is a mystical figure who appears in each generation and who possesses superhuman abilities that allow her to combat the forces of evil. Buffy is not the only such slayer, but rather the latest in a long line of slayers who have all performed a similar function in society. Unlike a typical superhero, the power of the slayer in no way resides uniquely in Buffy herself, but

rather in the position that she is temporarily occupying. This replicates Bentham's notion that the perfect panoptic system is not dependent upon any single individual, but rather it is "a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it" (201). Foucault also emphasizes that "it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine" (202). This principle can be seen in the episode "What's My Line?" in which a new slayer appears to take Buffy's place after she has been dead for only two minutes. The idea of disembodied power is also apparent in *Angel*; while the show appears to emphasize Angel's unique identity as a vampire with a soul, we learn in the episode "I Will Remember You," in which Angel becomes temporarily human, that Angel is only one of the warriors fighting for the PTB and he is easily replaceable. Buffy and Angel are further removed from the typical superhero and linked more with the Foucaultian model in that they are themselves subject to the power which they represent. Buffy, for example, repeatedly struggles with the demands of being a slayer. In "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date," Buffy argues with Giles about whether or not it is possible for a slayer to date boys. Buffy compares her role to that of Superman, who had Lois Lane, but Giles argues that, for a slayer, "dating is problematic at best." Buffy also differs from Superman in that she is fulfilling a prophecy and is therefore not allowed the same freedom to make choices or mistakes. As she complains in the episode "Reptile Boy," "I told one lie, I had one drink," to which Giles replies, "Yes, and you were very nearly devoured by a giant demon snake. The words 'let that be a lesson' are a tad redundant." While such scenes serve to metaphorically depict the trials faced by average teenagers, as Wilcox points out (20), they also demonstrate the severe consequences that accompany Buffy's attempts to ignore or circumvent her slayer duties. These episodes demonstrate that Buffy's behavior is controlled and disciplined even while she appears to be the one doing the disciplining. Angel presents an even more extreme case: due to a gypsy curse, he is given a soul that forces him to realize the horrors he committed as a vampire, and, in addition to this burden of guilt, he is unable to experience even a moment of true happiness or he will once again transform into his evil self. Like Buffy, Angel is prevented from having a normal life, and he is forced to concentrate only on the role he plays for the PTB.

Therefore, rather than being "anarchists," as Colonel McNamara of The Initiative claims, Buffy and her allies actually fulfill the promise of Foucault's institutional apparatus. Due to its excessive and inefficient use of force, The Initiative is repeatedly shown to be a failed institution of discipline and punishment, and even the Wolfram and Hart law firm, which appears to be incorporating demons into modern institutions of penalty, is similarly shown to be a corrupt perversion of the legal system. In contrast to these institutions, Buffy and Angel operate within

a system that efficiently employs surveillance and discipline in a new economy of power. Although on the surface Buffy might appear to be a figure of feminist resistance, and *BtVS* might be interpreted as politically progressive, a closer look at the show's representation of power relations reveals that the figure of the young woman is merely being employed to signal the fact that modern structures of discipline and punishment are so thorough and diffuse that they can be embodied in even the most unlikely agents. Rather than simply relying on formal analysis, then, an argument for the show's potential for effecting positive political change would be better served by examining its reception among fans and audiences.

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# **The Oklahoma City Bombing and Policy Agendas in the Media**

## **Prologue**

The tragic events that transpired in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 have drawn much needed attention to the study of terrorism and its impact on Western society; the creation and motive behind cultural productions like newscasts; and the existence and persistence of governmental responses to incidents of terrorism. This paper was written before these tragic events transpired, but the topic of how the media is used by policy elites is timely. Considering the rapidly developing restrictions on civil liberties, alterations in the social norms that govern justice and define freedom, and the seemingly fundamental alterations in American legal structures that are transpiring, such a study provides insight into the mediated rationales for these changes.

The reader should note that many of the same issues from the era just before, and for a year after, the Oklahoma City bombing are currently being discussed in the media and by policy elites as solutions to the current crisis. These seemingly forgotten debates, and contiguous Congressional actions, ended with the passage of Public Law 104-132. The policy process left several issues unresolved and specifically several suggested policy changes were left out of the final legislation package because of political, constitutional, or other objections. Such left-over policies include additional restrictions on fund raising, electronic surveillance and wiretapping; policy that addresses the potential use of weapons of mass destruction; and immigration restrictions designed to control certain ethnic groups. These are previously debated and passed over policies; state agency representatives are once again using some with far more restrictive versions as a solution for the current crisis. These draconian policies may appear to have been quickly drafted in response to September 11, but what is interesting is where these policies come from. They represent a documentation of the how and the why of a process whereby when state agencies did not get all of their requests granted after the debates on the Oklahoma bombing were finalized in 1996, they were able to reinvent these very same issues as responses to the current crisis facing America. After a crisis occurs, like that posed by the recent attacks, these agencies quickly package these preexisting policy demands as solutions. They use the media to gather public support and increase the pressure on Congress to pass policies that may have been deemed not in the best interest of a democracy just a few years prior to the current crisis.

The history of terrorism policy debates and media presentations of those debates

documented in this article can provide the reader with an insight into what is happening today and why certain policy elites, especially agency managers, are so active in their pursuit of new powers and authority. What has changed since the time frame of this analysis (1995/1996) is the level of hegemonic debate and importance of the issues. A comparison between the two time frames does not imply an equality of impact between the two events. The Oklahoma City bombing was a far smaller and less damaging incident with respect to the legitimacy of the United States government and its policies. The current crisis is different in that the challenges presented by this act of terrorism have affected both the political and economic structure of this society. The result is that this article may understate the intensity of the co-optation of the media by these agencies and the role that the media plays in supporting the legitimacy of existing relations of power. A systematic examination of the current policies being enacted and the debates that have just ensued would be welcome. Such an analysis will take an extended period of time to conduct but has the potential to further illuminate this important area of study.

### **Introduction**

This paper discusses the impact of certain interviews broadcast during a week of nightly newscasts related to the Oklahoma City bombing. The analysis focuses on how the coverage in the media may have influenced the policy discussions surrounding the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDP). The analytical expectation was that various influential policy making groups (business, special interest, and state managers) would use the opportunity afforded them by the intense media coverage of this act of terrorism to advocate for specific legislative policies.

Coverage intensity was examined first to establish the critical time frame for media interest in the Oklahoma City bombing story, and then to locate a logical cut off point for the coverage analysis. Coverage analysis was conducted to see who appeared on these broadcasts during this critical time frame and how the policy issues were framed during these interviews.

After the extent of policy elite participation was identified, the content of the actual broadcasts was analyzed to identify discourse relative to specific policy issues incorporated into the AEDP. The issues include policies designed to curb fund raising activities by terrorist groups; immigration issues related to terrorism; computer issues that tie to this particular antiterrorism legislation; concerns over potential nuclear, biological or chemical terrorism; debates related to explosives and their use by terrorists; and lastly, death penalty reform. The impetus for this discussion was to investigate how, and if, the media influenced the AEDP policy process and what effects the massive amount of media coverage had on the

development of this omnibus package of legislative policies that eventually codified some of these issues into law.

### Coverage Intensity

On April 19, 1995 at 9:02 a.m., a truck bomb ripped apart the nine-story Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. The blast collapsed many portions of the building and trapped victims underneath tons of rubble. Almost immediately after the blast, a helicopter news crew was over the scene televising the collapsed building and documenting the efforts of countless fire, police, and rescue personnel.

Television networks devoted extensive on-air time and back room resources to the bombing incident. During the first seven days of coverage, the nightly network newscasts from ABC, CBS, and NBC averaged 80% of their broadcast time on this story (see Table 1). On the eighth day of coverage, on-story time dropped to the mid 40% range. Analysis of the content of these broadcasts was thus limited to seven days, April 19 to April 25, 1995.

Table 1: Percentage of Broadcast Time Per Network  
**BROADCAST TIME SPENT ON OKLAHOMA CITY  
 BOMBING STORY BY MAJOR NETWORKS**

Name of Network	APRIL							7 day avg. %
	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th	
ABC	84.25	86.49	86.96	86.82	71.31	87.32	53.97	79.59
CBS	73.17	99.20	89.74	91.87	60.94	88.89	45.08	78.41
NBC	93.28	91.34	90.55	93.89	72.03	70.23	65.25	82.37

Sources: ABC 1995a–1995g, CBS 1995a–1995g, NBC 1995a–1995g, respectively.

The virtual army of media personalities and support staff that descended on this story generated nightly news reports all over the United States and around the world. Most importantly for this study, was the question of whether and how business representatives, public interest group spokespersons, and state managers used this unique opportunity to further their policy agendas, for or against the issues before Congress.

Analysis of the overall number of speakers in the media coverage is presented in Table 2. Speakers refer to everyone, identified or presented anonymously, who was given the opportunity to make a verbal expression on the broadcasts during the week of newscasts. In order to conduct this analysis, videos of the 21 broadcasts were systematically surveyed as to speakers and the content of their presentations.

Table 2: Profile of Media Broadcasts  
**MEDIA PROFILE**

Number of speakers on Each broadcast day

4/19	4/20	4/21	4/22	4/23	4/24	4/25
125	125	107	106	96	103	89

Number of speakers

ABC 236	CBS 297	NBC 216
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Number of speakers on story

On story 656	Related story 22	Off story 71
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Sources: ABC 1995a–1995g, CBS 1995a–1995g, NBC 1995a–1995g

Of the six hundred seventy-eight on-story speakers used in these twenty-one broadcasts, only thirty qualify as one of the three categories of policy elites defined by this study (see Table 3). State managers were the most active policy elites during this week of newscasts.

Table 3: Speaker Classification  
**SPEAKER CATEGORIES**

CATEGORY	TOTAL NUMBERS
Business representatives	3
Public interest groups	8
State managers	19

Sources: ABC 1995a–1995g, CBS 1995a–1995g, NBC 1995a–1995g

The interviews of all thirty representatives were used in a total of seventy-seven places during the broadcasts that week. State managers accounted for sixty-three of the seventy-seven instances. Not only were state managers the largest group of policy elites to be interviewed, their expert opinions were used in the media more frequently than any other group.

### **State Managers and the Media**

In sharp contrast to the almost non-existent pattern of business involvement in the media, state managers were very active and they clearly dominated the informational flow in the media. These state managers offered policy recommendations and they advocated for the support and expansion of their particular agency's mission during these broadcasts. Evidence for this assertion can be found in the analysis of the specific policy areas used in this study.

The nineteen state managers could be subdivided into two interrelated groups: appointed and elected officials. The ten appointed officials included current agency heads, state managers, and past state employees with significant philosophical and policy advocacy connections to their former agency. Nine politicians were covered in the media during the week of post-bombing analysis. Five of these politicians were Washington based and four had direct connections to Oklahoma.

Understanding the interaction between state managers, policy, and the media is complex. Three specific variables were used to help understand this interaction. The first variable tracked calls for specific policies to deal with terrorism. During the coverage week, only seventeen direct calls for specific policies were recorded from the total pool of on-story speakers. In conjunction with this variable, tracking of two other variable categories related to state managers, policy, and television coverage are relevant. Specifically, the variables that tracked calls for punishment and justifications for state violence are associated with audience expectations of state managers. Sixty-two separate calls for punishment and thirty-three justifications for state violence were recorded. Taken together these variables supported state manager claims for new policy since they would be seen as responding to public demands.

State managers were not strictly advocating for policy agendas, they quickly recognized the need to respond to this tragedy. The response by the state took on a variety of forms, including the localization of the crisis, reinforcements of a general fear of outsiders, and support for the idea that this was a crisis situation.

First, state managers recognized the need for, and responded with, highly visible efforts to help the local community address the bombing and its effects. On April 19, NBC reporter Brian Williams stated that almost immediately after the bombing Federal agencies "sent elements of the DOJ including the FBI, FEMA, ATF, U.S. Marshals and Secret Service" (NBC 1995a). Some of these agencies were dispatched to provide disaster relief and others to aid in the investigation of the crime scene.

This type of supportive response would be typical in the case of a terrorist attack. In addition to this physical support, state managers suggested that the preexisting policy initiatives before Congress needed enactment to keep such attacks from happening again. After the bombing Senator Nichols noted that they "are going to work on some legislation to give additional power, authority" to the FBI

“so they can infiltrate” domestic terrorist groups (NBC 1995e). Likewise, towards the end of the week ABC anchor Peter Jennings said, “there is every indication today that Congress is going to try to move very quickly to pass antiterrorism legislation” (ABC 1995e). Existing terrorism policy initiatives were seemingly placed on a legislative fast track due to this incident.

With the demands for, and proclamations about, the need for counter terrorism policy, what specific initiatives were in play? Early in the week of coverage an unidentified citizen called for “tighter controls on people coming” into the United States (NBC 1995b). What is interesting is how this public sentiment was aligned to the policy debates on immigration reform that had been active since the World Trade Center bombing incident and embodied in pre-bombing policy initiatives already before Congress.

Noting the opportunity to advance their cause, state managers stepped forward and offered specific policy suggestions during the week after the attack. NBC reporter Brian Williams reported that President Clinton “wants to set up a Federal government counter-terrorism center headed by the FBI” (NBC 1995f). On the same day, CBS reporter Rita Braver noted that President Clinton would “ask Congress to give the FBI increased authority to monitor credit, hotel and travel records, as well as telephone communications of suspected terrorists” (CBS 1995f). Likewise, Dan Rather reported that Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich “said today he supports more Federal monitoring of possible domestic terrorists groups” (CBS 1995f). James Fox, an ex-FBI agent, and at that time a CBS staff terrorism expert, commented on Gingrich’s observations and said he “would agree with the speaker on this issue. Presently, Federal law enforcement agencies operate under the restrictions of the Attorney General guidelines for investigating terrorist operations and they can be ... too restrictive” (CBS 1995f).

The debate on which policies were going to be added to the terrorism proposal before Congress had already begun prior to the bombing. It took on new urgency as a result of the post-bombing policy advocacy by state managers, and was seemingly legitimated by the media coverage. For example, the newly elected Republican majority added death penalty reform to the pre-bombing package, and during coverage of the Oklahoma City incident, they put this firmly into the policy debates. House Speaker Gingrich said he had “recommended that...if people are indicted and convicted after a fair trial, they should be executed within a reasonable time” (CBS 1995f). There was some dissension to these calls for new and restrictive policies. Laura Murphy Lee, spokesperson for the ACLU, said “we don’t need any more powers, we just need to do good law enforcement” (NBC 1995f). These faint cries of dissent was overwhelmed by the shrill voices calling for immigration reform, altered legal authority for the FBI, more monitoring of electronic communications, and faster application of punishments like the death penalty.

Throughout the week, reporters echoed the dominant discourse embodied by state managers. These calls suggest that the attack had long-term political and social effects. CBS reporter Bob McNamara observed “gone in a few seconds — but gone forever — is the middle-American sense of security, replaced with the sinking feeling that suddenly no place is safe” (CBS 1995a). Likewise, by the middle of the week, people had a good idea of the fate of the victims and wanted some form of vindication. Dr. Bob Arnot, a CBS reporter, remarked that “the predominant emotion here in Oklahoma City now is anger and it’s only going to grow” (CBS 1995c).

In addition, many calls for direct state-sponsored violence were offered after the bombing and aimed at quelling the public anger arising out of the attack on the Murrah Federal building. These justifications were focused on the prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators while reflecting the desire of political elites to reform the death penalty. For example, President Clinton condemned the attack and noted that “justice will be swift, certain and severe” (NBC 1995a). Likewise, Attorney General Janet Reno noted that “the death penalty is available and we will seek it” (CBS 1995a). Interestingly, these calls crossed party lines with both Clinton and Reno offering support to the Republican-sponsored policy initiative.

### **Mediated Discourse Theories**

These justifications support Gerbner’s (1992) contention that state officials will seize the moment and frame political dissidents who commit terrorism as abnormal and deviant. Gerbner’s theory suggested that a tie should exist between the politics of power control and news media coverage. This idea is supported by the data herein. State manager advocacy in the media also supported the ideas of other media theorists. For example, Bruck (1992) used the term *spectaculuarization* to describe crisis periods whereby the spectacle of violence is used to validate viewer’s feelings of turmoil. Twenty-four percent (24 %) of speakers on the network broadcasts offered some expression supportive of this concept.

Likewise, Halliday, et al. (1992), reminds us that coverage of terrorism may demonstrate a deliberate use of the “evil other” in order to continue the existing relations of power. This study examined the use of the evil other stereotype to discover if the discourse around specific victims, specifically the children hurt in the explosion, was used by state managers to justify their policy recommendations. Creation of an evil other refers to the dehumanization process associated with an individual, or group, and the successful application of a stigmatic label. During the week after the bombing, the use of the evil other stereotype was widespread and frequent. In nearly thirty percent (29.80%) of the cases, the speaker made reference to some variety of evil other.

As a general framing technique, the victims, and especially the children who

died in this bombing, were used to create a feeling that the bombers were evil. One unidentified woman said, "I think killing children is absolutely abominable ...nothing can justify that" (CBS 1995b). Tom Brokaw, the NBC anchor on April 21, stated "what is so haunting about this tragedy, what is so difficult to comprehend, is the madness of the act first, then the children" (NBC 1995c). The madness characterization was reinforced by repeated images of rescue workers frantically trying to find anyone left alive. On the fourth day after the bombing, reporter Roger O'Neil described the heavy emotional burden this effort places on rescue workers and noted that one rescuer told him that "when they break through to where the children are, we're still praying to see a little hand reach out to us" (NBC 1995e).

Concern for the children ran deep and many interviewees felt like the unidentified woman who told ABC that she "liked to think the women who passed on are watching over the little children so their mothers won't have to worry about them" (ABC 1995e). The message such comments communicated was that the bombing was an evil attack on defenseless children, those who committed this act were likewise evil, and something must be done about this.

After the initial shock, the questions became, who were the bombers and why did they do this evil act? Who they were was a question that was complicated by the changing nature of the threat and the mounting evidence that contradicted the early assertions made by many "experts" in the media. In the early days of the investigation, Muslim extremists were the first to emerge as suspects. This category developed into one that included immigrants in general. As details of McVeigh's background emerged, the blame shifted toward the militias and other extremist groups.

On April 19, Connie Chung, a CBS anchor, told the nation the attack came without warning and "a U.S. Government source — told CBS News that it has Middle East terrorism written all over it" (CBS 1995a). Steve Emerson, the producer of a controversial Public Broadcast System documentary on terrorism, was interviewed and stated that Oklahoma City is "probably considered one of the largest centers of Islamic radical activity outside of the Middle East" (CBS 1995a). Using scenes from the documentary as a backdrop for his comments, CBS reporter Anthony Mason said this "scene is a convention of Muslims in 1992 sponsored by the Islamic Association of Palestine...this meeting in Oklahoma City was attended by members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Muslim Brotherhood" (CBS 1995a). These presentations helped fuel public perceptions that the evil other was different, non-Christian, irrational, and violent.

A more generalized fear of outsiders was also present in the comments. Mike Boettcher, a native Oklahoman and NBC reporter, described this fear when he noted that at "the High Noon Café, a showdown with lax immigration policies was

recommended...anger was building...the demand that something be done was more common” (NBC 1995b). Echoing a similar fear of outsiders, an unidentified man said “that’s what we get for letting foreign people into this country” (NBC 1995b).

It was not just reporters and ordinary citizens who expressed these types of prejudices. State managers like Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating expressed similar fears when he was shown standing before the wrecked Federal building and said “they come in...and do something like this” (NBC 1995b). Likewise, Buck Revell, a former FBI official turned CBS analyst, expressed the sentiment that our borders are out of control and how “essentially, we allow people to come here of all types...drug traffickers, organized criminals and terrorists — without any checks or controls” (CBS 1995b).

Arabs and immigrants were not the only evil others used in the aftermath of the bombing. After two days of story development, and when the background of Tim McVeigh become known, the militia movement became the evil other de jour. These anti-government extremists were portrayed as violent, dangerous, and a threat to the American way of life. Buck Revell discussed the nature of militias and how they encourage a violent ideology. He declared “if you are willing to kill Federal officers...If you are willing to commit armed robberies...to assassinate other individuals...then the next step is mass murder or a terrorist-type incident” (CBS 1995c).

Connecting militia criticisms to the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the issue of gun control, CBS reporter Eric Enberg described NRA members’ anger at the FBI and ATF as one motive for such terrorist acts. He quotes an NRA board member as saying, “if you send your jack booted, baby burning bushwhackers to confiscate my guns, pack them a lunch. It’ll be a damned long day” (CBS 1995g). The militia and gun fanatics were vilified in the media. The media vilification process supported existing relations of power by picturing militia criticisms as illegitimate. The fact that state agencies may have committed serious violations of the law at Waco and Ruby Ridge was forgotten for a moment because these critics seemed so outrageous and not worthy of serious consideration.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) offered an explanation for the processes by which the evil other is used to justify existing relations of power. His concept of hegemony helps explain how in the face of real questions of political legitimacy those posing the questions are dismissed and vilified. The ideology of law and order that is the foundation for law enforcement agencies like the FBI and ATF can be used against easily targeted critics like the evil other since they represent a challenge to the *status quo*. In media coverage, dominated by state managers, the real question was not if the government was acting to protect its own interests, but framed as why they were not doing more to protect America from this criminal element.

### **Policy Themes in the Media**

The previous analysis offered evidence that policy discussions were present in the media presentations on the bombing. These discussions were part of the public discourse surrounding the bombing and they were included in a media dialogue that one specific group controlled. While state managers advocated for the package of laws before Congress only several of the actual issues discussed above were directly mentioned during broadcasts. General support for all issues was present.

Specifically, two issues were the most prominent in the media presentations by state managers. Throughout the media broadcasts both state managers and the general public discussed immigration policies. While most of the policy debate on immigration was the result of faulty reporting of the Oklahoma City bombing as an international terrorist incident, the fact remains that prejudice and fear motivated these discussions.

State managers were singularly visible on this issue and pushed for the immigration policy solutions contained in the pre-bombing proposals already before Congress. Direct references to existing policy proposals was made by Governor Keating, Senator Nichols, and Commissioner Kelly. Keating specifically addressed the ideas behind the immigration policies when he voiced a distrust of outsiders and said they “come in, you know, come in 1500 miles and — and do something like this” (NBC 1995b). Nichols suggested that Congress needed to quickly address and pass immigration legislation (NBC 1995e). Kelly noted that America is “susceptible and it’s the price we pay for living in a free and open society” (NBC 1995a). He further advocated for policies designed to stop international terrorism and used the World Trade Center bombing as justification for the package of policies before Congress.

Likewise, directly after the Oklahoma City bombing, four state managers were quoted in the media as supportive of the death penalty for the perpetrators of this tragedy and for the need to change policies related to this issue. Janet Reno noted that “18 USC Section 844 relates to those who maliciously damage or destroy a Federal building. If there is death, if death occurs, the death penalty is available and we will seek it” (ABC 1995a). Clinton noted that “these people are killers and they will be treated as killers” (NBC 1995a). A few days later, Gingrich specifically addressed the proposals before Congress when stating, “I’ve recommended that we pass an appeal limitation so that these guys, if they are convicted — I’m not prejudging anyone — but if people are indicted and convicted after a fair trial, they should be executed within a reasonable time” (ABC 1995f). State agency representatives were highly visible in the media with respect to the issue of death penalty reform and while advocating directly for this policy change, they were also indirectly promoting a variety of other policies before Congress (fund raising, WMD’s, etc.).

**Conclusions**

The analysis of the media coverage presented herein provides evidence for four conclusions. These included how the intensity of the coverage allowed policy elites the opportunity to get their definition of reality across to the public. Secondly, state managers clearly dominated the policy discussion in the media. Thirdly, the discussions revolved around political legitimation and not economic justifications for policy. Lastly, policy issues were discussed in the media with state managers having been the most active policy advocacy group, particularly with respect to the immigration and death penalty provisions.

The coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing was most intense during the first week after the bombing. The enormous resources used by the networks, the air time devoted to this attack, and the constant flow of images from the damaged Murrah Federal building, demanded that something be done about this attack. In response, state managers offered their expertise and advice to the nation. Because of positional qualifications and because they used their organizational expertise, their perspectives held a distinct advantage over other policy positions televised during this time. When the audience sought a sense of normalcy, they listened and trusted those state managers appearing in their living rooms nightly. They provided an easily digested answer as to why this tragedy happened, as well as solutions to this crisis in the form of existing policy proposals already before Congress. During this advocacy, they offered solutions that were beneficial to their agencies and in the process tried to expand the powers regulated to their agencies.

At a more structural level, the general public and these state managers focused on the political crisis that terrorism posed and stayed away from the manifest and latent economic consequences of such an attack. The end result was that capitalism and economic dynamics were not a dominant frame in the discussions, while political legitimation was a dominant frame.

The final conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that during times of extreme violence and crisis, the media seeks the expertise of state agencies regarding what has been done to fight terrorism and what should be done. Typically these answers take the form of policies designed to cure the problems the latest atrocity pose. These policy solutions will eventually benefit state agencies by granting them additional resources and power. State managers could be considered the winners in this process, since it was their definitions of reality and interpretations of events that framed the media coverage and public opinion.

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### Notes

1. In January of 1995, just prior to the Oklahoma City bombing, Congress began debate on a comprehensive package of counter terrorism legislation. This pre-bombing collection of laws would be altered as a result of the attack and subsequently become law just over a year after the bombing. Of the six issues listed herein, five pre-dated the bombing and only the death penalty was added to the original package. Details on the process of alteration and history of these individual issues can be found in Ballard (2000).
2. In order to conduct this analysis the study used existing video records from the Vanderbilt Television News Archives collection of network nightly newscasts. The collection is abstracted, including time sequence, based on story level descriptions. In this analysis, reported percentages are based on the amount of story time in ten-second intervals divided by the actual length of the complete broadcast.
3. These three groups were isolated because of their influence, expert status, and accessibility to the media. They represent categories of policy elites that are generally thought to most influence the development of public policy (Domhoff 1967, Domhoff 1970, Domhoff 1978, Domhoff 1980, Domhoff 1983, Domhoff 1986, Domhoff 1987, Domhoff 1990, Quadagno 1984, Skocpol 1979, Skocpol 1980, Skocpol 1985 ).
4. In some cases speakers were interviewed multiple times during the week of broadcasts. This was the result of the need to address the changing facts of the case and the speakers' positional qualifications (expertise on either legal or terrorism issues). These frequencies only represent a count of how many representatives from each group appeared.
5. They included DOJ head Janet Reno, current FBI associates Weldon Kennedy and Louis Freeh plus ex-FBI associates Victoria Teonsing, Buck Revell, and James Fox. The other four included ATF head John McGraw, FEMA head James Witt, DoD head William Perry, and Ray Kelly, a former NYC Policy Commissioner. Kennedy led this group with nine instances of coverage during the week; Reno was covered in seven cases, and McGraw, Revell, and Fox had multiple instances of coverage. The others were each covered by the media on single occasions.
6. President Clinton, First Lady Hillary Clinton, House Leader Newt Gingrich, Senate leader Bob Dole and House member Steve Stockman did not have a direct political tie to Oklahoma. Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating, First Lady Cathy Keating, Oklahoma Senator Don Nichols and Oklahoma City Mayor Ron Norich all held positions directly related to this state at the time of the bombing. President Clinton had 18 incidents of coverage.
7. The use of the term speaker in this section refers to the total pool of on-story interviewees.

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# **Public Access Television Producers As Storytellers and Folklorists**

Cable Public Access Television has undergone many changes over its thirty-year existence. From U.S. Congress legislation in 1968 (known as the “community soapbox”), written to stem the dominance of the national networks, to Manzi and Brugnoli’s description of a “bizarro universe” inhabited by hair-brained politicians, pseudo psychics, and other loons who 30 years ago would have probably held court in a local bus terminal (32), cable access television has led a struggling and controversial existence. In fact, cable access television has incorporated these two descriptions into its development. The medium has served as a stage for various (and sometimes obscure) ideas as well as provided a haven for a number of “crazies who get attention through the use of government-purchased TV cameras” (Yoder 7-8).

Overall, cable access television has matured in many positive and negative ways. This process has largely taken place due to the many “crazies” –volunteers who devote their time and energy to access TV. Between the years of 1995 and 1998 I conducted an ethnographic study of cable access television producers in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Using the Allen County Public Library Cable Public Access Center, my study examined cable access television producer motivations, genre usage in their programming, and audience considerations used in television programs’ content and design (9-10). Although live, call-in interactive, and informational-style studio programs were the fastest growing program format used by producers, my study determined that genre served little, if any, purpose for access producers in their program designs. Additionally, my research determined that ego-gratification and program entertainment values were the main motivators of access producers. Finally, access producers rarely considered content, themes, and presentation methods in relation to audience needs.

During this study I discovered that access producers have little awareness of genre use. For the most part, they didn’t even know what “genre” meant! Additionally, I found their program content directly related to their personal issues and professional experiences. Finally, I found that access producers rarely consider their audiences’ needs while developing their programs.

While not addressed in my original Fort Wayne study, I uncovered interesting insights and revelations based on access producers’ perceptions about themselves. The application of folklore and storytelling characteristics to the world of community access television storytellers proved to be an interesting topic. I also found indications that these producers are part of a storytelling community with its

own folklore. The access producers that I interviewed demonstrated a distinct awareness of themselves as members of a special group who shared common interests, similar abilities, and memorable experiences. Many producers expressed a sense of community with their peers. Due to varying producer schedules and an independent entrepreneur atmosphere, this sense of community was not measured by units of time and space because information sharing and group meetings are not conducive in this particular television community environment. Producers' sense of community was a state of mind, a particular person's feelings about him/herself.

During the twenty-four individual producer interviews, direct participant observations, and textual analysis, it became apparent to me that even though they did not use traditional genre and audience conventions, access producers became aware that they had a potentially strong influence over the public access channel including its production, content, and, to a limited extent, the distribution of its programs and messages. The concept of groups having control over the messages and channels with which to transmit them is a "folk definition" in that access producers are a group who use and study the media in which they participate (Djupedal 69).

To further categorize producers, I posed four questions about folklore and storytelling use: What is the role of folklore in access producers' stories? How do producers use folklore to get their messages across to audiences? Is the use of folklore a conscious attempt by access producers to further their own interest or the interests of others? Does the combined use of access television and folklore help audiences believe what they see and hear?

To begin, I define and explain three categories of access producers: ego promoters, message/issue practitioners, and story/entertainment providers. Included in these definitions and descriptions, I utilize direct quotations from the producers to assist in the telling of their stories. Following these descriptions, a second theme focusing on the community of access producers' will be addressed.

### **Group Definitions of Storytellers and Folklorists**

Djupedal (69) defines the study of folklore in groups as a novelty in which researchers study and define new groups under the generic term "mass media" (groups that control) and then study their folklore. He knows of no study of the folklore within groups which control the production and transmission of messages through the channels of mass communication. After completing my study of Fort Wayne access producers, I discovered that they, in fact, do have *limited* control over the access channel mostly in the production area with a semblance of input over transmission decisions. This "control" provides producers with a strong group identity within the media institution of access television and stands in contrast to a general perception in some media quarters that PATV (public access television) is

an “amateurish” endeavor (McQuail 107-08). McQuail elucidates that group identity rests upon the work of other professionals. And, after 50 hours of interviews, I realized that access producers believe themselves to be a group of “identifiable professionals.” Mass media groups as access producers can be considered “esoteric,” those with a specialized knowledge of culture within a community (Djupedal 73). Such knowledge is kept by “guardians” who influence the wider esoteric knowledge of a particular group. Since access producers are a group which has control over their messages and the media channel which transmits them, they can be assumed to have their own group conventions, customs, and unwritten rules. This group is a legitimate object of study for a folklorist. Media researchers have based similar concepts such as “media institution,” media organization, and mass communicator upon the “folk” definition cited earlier.

My personal interviews revealed that many producers reflect the characteristics listed above when presenting their programs. Further scrutiny showed that producers take different approaches in presenting their stories. After examining their program styles and formats, I found some common inclinations among these producers with regard to the story types and personal motivations they used in their programs. After further sifting through the interviews, I fashioned three distinct categories which clarifies producers’ story styles and personal presentations: ego promoters, message/issue practitioners, and story/ entertainment providers.

In creating these categories, I referred to Schenda’s observations concerning mass media’s role in the maintenance of old and the creation of new folklore genres (Dégh 1). Particularly, I applied how the media are used to promote consumption and how individuals (access producers) take media instruments into their own hands to maintain, reconstruct, create, and transform traditional storytelling practices. There have been studies conducted that examined how professional communicators and folk (audience members) consume media in certain social contexts (23-4). A traditional context of media consumption is monetary reward in which producers sell their stories in the marketplace, and folk consume the advertising of those story sponsors. In this particular case, public access producers are nonprofessionals not selling stories and audiences are not exposed to advertising. In order to get their folk to consume access programs, and using collaboration with access channel staff and volunteers, producers design many stories (folklore) about the community in which they reside that local cable television consumers can identify with and relate to.

As a group, access producers could be further separated in two narrower types: individuals associated with identifiable groups such as organized religious and sectarian organizations and non-affiliated individuals from the local community. These individuals can be further separated into those who are issue-oriented and those who use the access facility for utilitarian purposes such as vocational or amusement.

### Ego Promoters

Ego promoters are defined as those producers who directly interject themselves into the story they are telling on the access television channel. These producers possess a “look at me” approach to storytelling, i.e., they tell stories from a first person perspective. Although topics and themes play a role, I discovered these producers are not necessarily concerned with specific content objectives in their stories as much as they are personally involved in the story presentation and how viewers perceive their involvement. For example, ego promoters host, as well as produce, their own access programs. Generally, ego promoters select story information using an eclectic approach. That is, they select either socially or culturally relevant stories from which they receive an inordinate amount of attention. In other instances they insert themselves into stories from which they can receive sufficient amounts of personal celebrity. A self-important relationship with a particular story is prevalent in this access producer’s category. In effect, producers place themselves as the principles in their stories. For example, Tom O. has been an access producer for more than ten years. He is a Fort Wayne landlord who has been attempting to get elected to any local, political office for several years. He uses his access programs, which titles include “The Tom O. Show,” an opinion program with a libertarian flavor; “Drug Wars,” a video surveillance expose of neighborhood drug trafficking; and a variety of pseudo-political programs promoting lesser-known area candidates (including himself).

Tom O.: “I fought the opposition from the newspapers about it (a proposed Fort Wayne city drug ordinance), but by having the stuff on there (videotaped drug purchases) I guess I took a knife to the belly of the beast and cut it open and let its guts hang open for everyone to see about the problems that we had out here...I don’t think I’m there to entertain somebody. I want to show it like it is...I want to make public opinion.” (Yoder 367)

By using access television to present his stories and issues, Tom O. feels he is reinforcing beliefs his audience shares with him:

“People know who I am. I’ve done a lot against crime in Ft. Wayne ...I’m running right now for county council-at-large. I think I have a good shot at it because a lot of people know who I am and I’ve got a good issue that I’m running on.”(370)

Other producers in this category share similar traits. Ego promoters embrace the notion that, through their access programs, they can determine agendas or topics

which community members can discuss. Bob E., a longtime producer/host at the access channel and host of the program, "It's Your Nickel," a live, audience call-in show, uses his program as an alternative means of information-sharing among community members. In a sense, he tries to create or reconstruct ways through which people get information.

Bob E.: "We've had several shows where we've brought up a subject, talked about it and, two days later, it's on the front page of the newspaper and nobody has ever talked about it before. We got people watching the show, reporters and people from the TV stations that are getting clued in...Just the number of people we are reaching and the range of people is interesting...The format works better than any I've seen any other place. We get more phone calls than any other talk show in the world." (377)

(As demonstrated in this quotation, bravado can be considered a secondary criterion for this producer's category.)

Initially, some ego promoters begin as producers advocating an issue or promoting some sort of a personal project. Many of these producers can also be categorized as message/issue practitioners (discussed later). Ego promoters integrate themselves into the story's center and the original program topic becomes confused with producer self-interest. Crane H., a social service agent, began his program, "Coalition Toward a Positive Future," as one that dealt with inner city youth issues and racism. Over time, the program's message and the host's personality, have blurred.

Crane H.: "I keep doing it because it's a lot of fun and I like seeing my face on TV. There's no doubt that I like that. Being popular is fun and having people on the street say they saw you on TV is fun. I don't try to hide it. Once you get in front of the camera and your friends see you, you are going to want to come back." (456)

Apart from the "look at me" syndrome, Crane H. felt that he assisted his audience in reconstructing misinformation from traditional information sources about his issues:

"I think it gives the youth a chance to be here and it gives older Ft. Wayne a chance to see what's going on with the kids. Instead of making assumptions, they get to hear where the kids are coming from. That is the biggest thing that most communities have missed. They get to read about them in the newspapers, but those views are slanted. So, this way, they

can hear exactly what is coming out of their mouths and they can figure out that not all kids are the same.” (457)

In this category, access producers seek the celebrity and notoriety that access television provides as opposed to any other qualities the medium may present. The next category identifies access producers who believe the message is the most important ingredient in their productions.

### **Message/Issue Practitioners**

Message/issue practitioners are producers whose stories are based on single themes or messages. These themes and messages are the most important element to their storytelling. I refer to these producers' storytelling approaches from a “Wake up, people, I want your attention” or a citizen-activist perspective, meaning that they tell stories from a point-of-view that are issue and activist-oriented or that have a profound, personal meaning.

Stories told by this group could be loosely classified as “legends” due to the fact that many of these programs are nonfictional and concern ordinary people in the local community (Dégh 80). In some cases, the messages and methods used in these shows are respected and revered by other producers. Many message/issue practitioners were mentioned during the producer interviews through phrases such as “How I wish I could do what that producer did” or, “Yes, I remember what so and so producer did in ‘91”:

Steve M: “I’ve received a lot of compliments from producers about my productions. I keep going back to the fact that a lot of my programming is religious and probably always will be, but producers and volunteers...have been attracted to the programming that I’ve done and that’s kind of a test market for the community and the way I want the community to respond. When people watch my show,...I want them to say ‘Wow, that’s neat!’ ” (Yoder 469)

Message/issue practitioners do not necessarily host their own programs. These producers constantly presented textual content in their stories, whereas personality-driven performances are secondary concerns. In many cases, these practitioners work behind the scenes as traditional producers. Some of them host or co-hosted their shows. A few appear as guests or “experts” on the program’s topic area. Generally, message/issue practitioners believe their role in storytelling is to provide viewers with a specific perspective on a topic they believe is important to the well being and interests of others. The fact that these producers receive a great deal of personal notoriety or attention may seem incidental. Whether the subject is community health education for the poor or religious programs for outreach and

family counseling, message/issue practitioners concentrate on content control and getting out information. Outreach through the access channel can be the most effective method in telling their stories. And, since these producers are restricted from using commercial or other promotional media, mostly due to cost, they turn to public access television.

Awareness, acknowledgment, and acceptance by their audiences are the indispensable characteristics of this group of producers. Many producers in this category have direct or indirect relationships with religious or faith-based organizations. The vast majority of Channel 10 programming are religious-based programs and many are videotaped presentations of area church services. Ellis T. is a case manager for a job training and placement center in Ft. Wayne. To present his church's message, he was appointed by a bishop to become an access television producer.

Ellis T.: "...it's the message. Are people really tuning in? Are they inspired to come in and participate in our church? I've been in Ft. Wayne almost 40 years. It's a very volatile city and we need some positive role models. [Our bishop] is a positive role model. I'm more into getting the message out now." (482)

Some message/issue practitioners simply want to share a strong passion for a hobby or avocation with others. Bob H., a retired executive, produces the show, "Let's Have a Meeting," which promotes parliamentary procedures and Toastmasters. He has been personally involved with these topics for more than 30 years. His aim is to share his organizational experiences with his audience (335-41). Susan C. is a sales representative for a regional telephone company and is considered an "ice hockey junkie." Her program, "Heroes and Friends," is based on her "fanatic" devotion to hockey, particularly the International Hockey Association franchise the Fort Wayne Komets. Rather than presenting statistics and game highlights in her program, Susan C. concentrates on the personal lives and career aspirations of the Komets players and coaches. Using interviews and biographical segments, she attempts to get her audience to understand the Komets as actual people not simply as professional athletes (Yoder 405-14).

Other message/issue practitioners address personal causes based in political, social, or cultural concerns. For example, Terry G., an assembly line worker, uses his show, "Hemp Talk," to advocate the legalization and decriminalization of marijuana. He was motivated to produce this program because of changing circumstances at his job and his beliefs in personal privacy:

It started out that my company was going to start random drug testing. I'm a good employee so I said "OK." So now what can I do to fight back?

I told people I was in the closet all these years and now it makes no difference how good an employee I've been all these years —it comes down to the quality of my urine...I want to reform the marijuana laws. If it gets down to exactly what I want, I don't want someone thrown in prison because they've got pot in their house....In a sense ...I want them [the audience] to get politically activated. (417-18)

Some producers tell stories directly related to their vocations. Rick R. is a social worker and therapist who specializes in trauma, death, and disability. He produces message-oriented programs that help raise awareness and funding for issues he deems important.

Rick R.: "I think with almost everything I've done, there is some fairly heavy emotional content to it. There's also a pretty clear message that has something to do with healing, from emotional or psychological damage ...I think it would be fair to say that all of them (his programs) have to do with some kind of healing. I'm a fairly tenacious person and if I get an idea and feel powerful enough about it, I'm going to make it happen sooner or later...It's multifaceted...You have to believe strongly enough in a cause...if I can't effectively touch someone with a piece I'm working on, there's no point in doing it. I'm not going to produce shows that are "fluff." That's where I'm coming from." (Yoder 431)

These examples demonstrate a conscious attempt by access producers to further their own interests and the interests of others. All of these producers have made extraordinary efforts in localizing their messages to community cable viewers in order to communicate their meanings clearly and effectively.

The last category, Story/Entertainment Providers, includes producers who merely want to share their ideas and enjoy the television experience.

### **Story/Entertainment Providers**

Story/entertainment providers are defined as those producers who provide entertainment and variety programming to their audiences. Differing from message/issue practitioners, story performers generally create fictional scenarios for their audience's enjoyment or combine factual accounts using several thematic approaches to make fascinating programs. Granted, there are some producers in this category who possess an iota of self-promotion and could be classified as ego promoters. But, for the most part, these producers just want to enjoy a television experience. Rick H., a long time access producer and media manager, expressed his perspective on these producers and their programs.

Rick H: "I really think its pointless. Its just a personal observation, but a lot of the shows on this channel are pointless except for the vicarious experience of the individuals who produced them..." (276-77)

For the most part, story performers are process-oriented producers expressing utilitarian reasons in their access programs. Those reasons may be practical or personal. For example, for several years, the number one-watched show on Channel 10 was a program called "Totally Sarah," an eclectic mishmash in which a young teenager performed a 30 minute monologue by reading poetry, singing to pre-recorded music, and pontificating on various unrelated subjects. During her performances, Sarah's mother served as her camera operator using extreme close-ups and other nontraditional camera angles.

Some story performers create programs about community events or situations to which their audience can relate. These producers use local stories and folklore as material for their humorous messages. Eric H. is a screenwriter who produced two shows for access, "Fort Wayne Landmarks," a news show parody based on the syndicated program *Hard Copy* and, "Rude Boy," a pseudo- investigative journalism spoof using Geraldo Rivera-style presentation techniques.

Eric H: "[It's kind of] ...a parody...And for different segments of the show you might call upon influences, kind of pattern it off something. Like, the opening of it is edited like a James Bond fight almost, in the early days. It's real fast and goes with the flow of the motion. Kind of like a John Woo thing. And, then an interview thing, you just spoof it...Throughout the show, he's [the host] trying to get to the bottom of these various (Ft. Wayne) landmarks. Why they were built, why they aren't being used now, why they aren't being used for what they were originally made for..." (312)

Eric H.'s programs demonstrate how story/entertainment providers write tales by combining factual accounts with several variants — parody, satire, etc.— to make better storytelling for their audiences (Dégh 82). Generally, there are no deliberate advocacy or special interest messages used by these producers as with message/issue practitioners.

Other story/entertainment providers use access television for personal gratification. Mark G. is an assembly line worker at a local truck manufacturing plant and serves as producer for the program "Raiders of Access," a live call-in comedy show where four cast members don photocopied masks of celebrities and do interactive improvisations based on audience questions and comments.

Mark G: “[It’s all about ...] Self-satisfaction. I’m centered around what I want. I’m part of a group of like-thinking people who think the same, ‘Hey, this is fun!’ We satisfy ourselves. We don’t have a group of people, like a religious producer might consider ‘I need to save these people by giving them this message and this will help their day.’ I don’t have a message to give people. I’m just here to shout off and spout off and do what I want, what we want together. If that changes somebody’s life, that’s great. If it doesn’t, that’s great, too. I really don’t have any golden goal to reach. We kind of just do it. (Yoder 400)

These producers use stories and concepts that their audiences can relate to in order to further their own interests.

#### **Access Producers as a Folk Group**

Fort Wayne access producers tell stories about each other. They also desire to share production techniques and discuss programming concepts with each other. Many producers have either told or heard stories about fellow producers’ access exploits and experiences. Some accounts about a particular program’s content or producer’s style are almost legendary among the Fort Wayne access community. Almost all of them were cognizant of the fact that they belonged to a “special” group or social unit which has its own history, traditions, and practices. Through the sharing of stories and information, Fort Wayne access producers indicated that they have recognized their own “groupness,” which includes identifying traditions and “inherited” products and practices unique to themselves. Therefore, Fort Wayne access producers establish their own forms of folklore and share stories about each others’ lives, programs, and community topics through their personal interactions with the access channel audiences. And, it is through folklore and the constant expression and transmission of common traditions that a group’s identity is revealed, maintained, and confirmed (Abrahams 346). Here is where Fort Wayne public access producers can be identified as a folklore group.

Although Dégh defines folklore as a product of an ongoing historical process that consolidates literary and oral interactions in areas of professional and nonprofessional, formal and informal, and constructed and impoverished creativity (23), the formation of access producers as a group with their own folklore and stories seems to have been accelerated by the television medium through which they work. In this instance, a shift in perception of how folklore is formed, brought about by electronic communication, is warranted. Time and space provide less of an influence on the “groupness” of cable access producers than their state of mind and personal behavior which puts their cultural identification and communication patterns (of folklore) into a different perspective. This is not to say that the criteria

for folklore formation and sharing is merely delineated by traditional ideas of history. In addition to its basis in tradition and application to the current needs of the group and its "audience," Dégh recognizes that folklore criteria formed through new media is socially-relevant (35). In any electronic medium, the folklore of the identified group will simply appeal to a larger population and to more diverse social groups.

### **Audience Relationships**

In my original study, I determined that access producers made programming decisions without audience considerations in mind. Rarely do they consider audience needs or concerns when constructing any element of their programs. However, access producers do instill novelty and contemporary television narrative standards into their programs that, in turn, increase audience size and popularity. The application of narrative standards in access television by these producers is important in understanding how new folklore genres are created. How producers use access to promote audience consumption (viewership) and maintain, reconstruct, create, and transform traditional folklore practices is important.

Public access producers effectively tell stories to two separate audiences. One comprises "traditional" viewers — cable television subscribers who tune into the public access cable channel. Much like those described by McQuail (80), these audiences exist in the here and now and are delineated by the cultural dimensions of time, space, and social milieu within which folklore appears. The second audience is composed of fellow access producers who share, either directly or indirectly, many common and identifiable media experiences.

These audiences can be further described as "esoteric groups" (Djupedal 61), who possess a specialized knowledge of particular cultures within a community. The cultures, in this case, are comprised of access producers. Due to their communal, social and cultural experiences, access producers understand the "local" aspect of the cable audience. They believe their audiences are demographically similar, have had similar life experiences, and understand producers' intentions. Producers believe audience members are just like themselves, so why assume otherwise? Thus producers may deliberately ignore audience needs and write for themselves on the assumption that what would interest them would interest their audience (Gans 51). Rather than considering audience needs in genre or format applications, access producers have constructed ideals that represent their audiences, and use those as guides for the messages and stories that are cablecast. Although my original study found few direct connections, access producers felt a sense of comradery. Primarily, these sentiments resulted from viewing other producers' works on the access channel and recounting anecdotes about each other with colleagues and access channel volunteers.

The messages and stories those access producers create are acts of expression to draw the attention of their audience. These “performances” can heighten awareness of the story and give special license to any audience who identifies with that message (Bauman 1983). I found that producers’ stories are loosely constructed around the concept of “gathering common elements,” i.e., those cultural elements of time, space, and social milieu within which folklore appears (McQuail 36). Access producers do realize that a potential audience exists (either access viewers or other producers) and they plan to provide them with a completed story in advance. The access channel serves as a direct mode of communication where the story can be told and as a public gathering place (medium) that individual audience members can voluntarily use. Audience members watch because they expect to receive some emotional benefit from the story. Together, they create a new folklore genre using public access television.

Overall, public television access producers are an identifiable group of storytellers who possess a knowledge of the messages they want to deliver and an understanding of the control they have over the channels of delivery used. For differing reasons, each producer category identified in this essay — ego promoters, message/issue practitioners, and story/entertainment providers — shares stories grounded in social experiences and flavored with cultural knowledge of their community to their audiences. Ego promoters recount stories and local folklore in order to achieve self-importance and a modicum of celebrity. Message/issue practitioners tell stories to present activist perspectives and points-of-view. Story/entertainment providers simply tell stories for utilitarian reasons like personal gratification. Importantly, when studied as a social unit (Abrahams 347), access producers share personal and professional stories, histories, traditions, and practices unique to themselves. Through their common traditions and expressions of information, Fort Wayne access producers are identified as a folklore group.

Although they rarely make programming decisions with audience considerations in mind, access producers desire recognition from two, identifiable audiences, “traditional” cable television viewers and fellow access producers. Producers rely on these audiences to consume their stories, believe their tales, and further their interests. In the words of Roger Abrahams, “The term folklore has come to mean the accumulated traditions, the inherited products and practices of a specifiable group, as a social unit which has some notion of its own groupness” (346). After 30 years, public access television producers are known as a storytelling group with folk traditions.

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# AIDS Memoirs and Two Theoretical Approaches to the Dying Process

Facing imminent mortality and with their bodies rapidly deteriorating, some victims of AIDS have turned to memoiristic writing in an attempt to make order out of the chaos occurring in their lives and confront their tragic fates. Some AIDS memoirists call upon their narratives in order to vent their anger, frustration, and sense of hopelessness in the face of overwhelming odds and their perception of an apathetic, heartless government and public. Other memoirists utilize their narratives as a political forum for advocating increased funding for AIDS research and promoting heightened public awareness of the AIDS epidemic. Meanwhile, some memoirists write narratives designed not only to cope with the affliction, but to rise above the pain and fear by reaching a higher level of spirituality or enlightenment.

A number of AIDS memoirs are being written by artists and intellectuals—that is, by self-reflexive individuals whose natural instincts are to try to make sense out of the senseless, derive order out of disorder, and bring creative illumination to the stark realities of death and dying. Andrea R. Vaucher states that the AIDS epidemic will change how historians and future generations view art in the context of the late twentieth century. Vaucher observes that the discernible shift in emphasis from form to content in contemporary art may be attributed, in part, to the force with which the AIDS crisis “has shaken the collective psyche down to its creative bones” (7).

Of specific interest for this article are the AIDS memoirs by the following individuals: writer Paul Monette, whose 1988 *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* is one the first personal accounts of AIDS and stands as a testament to what it means to fully live and love, even while dying; anthropologist Eric Michaels' *Unbecoming*, a gritty and provocative 1990 diary chronicling the last year of his life as he became increasingly ill; and writer Mark Matousek, whose 1996 memoir *Sex Death Enlightenment* traces the author's search for spiritual meaning after being diagnosed HIV-positive.

These three memoirs have been selected for analysis because of the influence they have had on this subgenre of autobiographical writing, as well as their diversity in style and personal experience. Most importantly, these memoirs underscore the impulse of artists and intellectuals, when faced with crisis, pain, and loss, to textually draw meaning from their experience and creatively cope with their travails.

The purpose of this article is to provide a textual analysis of the autobiographical strategies and techniques utilized by four artists and intellectuals afflicted with

AIDS and confronting their mortality. The theoretical framework hinges on Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' five stages of death theory and is augmented by an alternative approach, the task-based theory, often cited in the literature of death and dying. In Kubler-Ross' first stage of death, the initial reaction of a terminally ill person is denial. The need for denial exists in every patient, but at the beginning of a serious illness more so than toward the end of life. She adds that denial is usually a temporary defense and is soon replaced with partial acceptance (51–61). After the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, Kubler-Ross observes that it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment. The terminally ill person asks "Why me?" and becomes filled with anger and rage when no clear answer emerges (63–65). The third stage of Kubler-Ross' theory involves bargaining, in which a terminally ill person seeks to postpone the inevitable by making promises of living a better life or being a better person if more time could be granted. Kubler-Ross states that the patient believes "there is a slim chance that he may be rewarded for good behavior and be granted a wish for special services. His wish is most always an extension of life..." (93–95). Depression, the fourth stage of death, emerges when the terminally ill patient can no longer deny the symptoms and the body is steadily becoming weaker. At this point, the patient's stoicism, anger, and rage are replaced with a sense of great loss. Kubler-Ross cites two types of depression facing the dying: a reactive depression, in which the patient confronts the numerous consequences of being seriously ill, such as loss of job and financial burdens; and a preparatory depression, in which the patient takes into account impending losses, such as separation from loved ones, once death occurs (97–100). The final stage of death is acceptance, in which the patient will have mourned the impending loss of family and friends and is contemplating death with a degree of quiet expectation (123–25).

Meanwhile, an alternative theory cited in the literature concerns Charles A. Corr's task-based approach to coping with dying. Four aspects of "task work" are identified by Corr: bodily needs, psychological security, interpersonal attachments, and spiritual energy and hope. The goal of this approach is to deal with the dying person in a holistic manner rather than addressing only specific symptoms and problems. Individual differences are acknowledged and broad generalizations are avoided because "they obscure the distinctive qualities of the individual and do not achieve universal validity" (88). According to Kastenbaum and Thuell, the task-based model is the most inclusive of the approaches because attention is given to the coping efforts of the dying person, family members, friends, and caregivers (178).

Corr states that the physical aspects of coping with dying primarily concern addressing bodily needs and the minimization of physical distress. Basic bodily needs involve nutrition, hydration, and elimination, as well as obtaining shelter from the

elements. Reducing physical distress encompasses pain management and the easing of distress caused by nausea, vomiting, and constipation (85). According to Corr, the psychological aspects focus on maximizing three features of life: security, autonomy, and richness. He notes that to be secure is to be as free as possible from anxiety, fear, or apprehension, and that autonomy centers on a person's ability to be self-governing. Richness, Corr observes, describes that which makes life satisfactory or bountiful. "What richness will mean for individuals must be left to their determination," he writes. "One person might prize serenity and the absence of threat; another might choose activity, creativity, and a degree of risk or danger" (86).

Meanwhile, Corr states, social task work hinges on sustaining and enhancing interpersonal attachments significant to the dying person in question. Interpersonal attachments must be honored, Corr points out, because humans are social creatures by nature. He adds: "In the midst of the challenges of coping with dying, it is critical ... that they be the interpersonal attachments valued by the person in question, not those whom others think that person should value" (86–87). Finally, Corr says that the spiritual aspects of coping with dying involve those sources from which one draws spiritual vigor and vitality. These sources depend upon the person's fundamental values and moral commitments. Corr adds that in the name of achieving a sense of wholeness, spirituality encompasses acceptance, reconciliation, self-worth, meaning, and purpose in living (87).

Corr maintains that in contrast to Kubler-Ross' stages of death theory, a task-based approach is designed to empower individuals coping with dying, with the person deciding "which tasks are important to me, how and when, if at all, they will be addressed..." He holds that a task-based approach does not concentrate on that which is obligatory ("must") or normative/prescriptive ("should" or "ought"). Instead, it emphasizes choices among possible tasks. "In this way," Corr notes, "it avoids the twin pitfalls of linearity and directedness that are prominent risks in any stage-based approach" (90).

### ***Borrowed Time***

In 1988, poet and novelist Paul Monette published the first personal account of AIDS—a riveting, poetic, heartbreaking work titled *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*. *Borrowed Time* is a ground-breaking chronicle of Monette's relationship with his lover Roger Horwitz, and how their lives were forever changed when Horwitz was diagnosed with AIDS in 1985. More specifically, *Borrowed Time* is a searing, gut-wrenching account of the last nineteen months of Horwitz's life, and how Monette and Horwitz fought against impossible odds to try to overcome the disease. And what makes the memoir all the more poignant is the reader's knowledge that Monette succumbs in 1995, at the age of forty-nine, to the same disease that claimed his lover.

In the early 1980s, Monette heard rumors and ambiguous reports about a so-called “gay cancer,” but dismissed them from his mind in sheer relief that the disease had not disturbed the bliss of his relationship with Horwitz. Those hopes came crashing down on March 12, 1985, when Horwitz was diagnosed with AIDS. From that moment, Monette observes, the world around him became defined by endings and closures. He notes that he and his friends in the Los Angeles gay community could hardly recall what it felt like to live in a world without the icy terror of AIDS looming ever in the shadows. Chillingly, Monette observes:

...we all watched the toll mount in New York, then in San Francisco, for years before it ever touched us here (in Los Angeles). It comes like a slowly dawning horror. At first you are equipped with a hundred different amulets to keep it far away. Then someone you know goes into the hospital, and suddenly you are at high noon in full battle gear. They have neglected to tell you that you will be issued no weapons of any sort. So you cobble together a weapon out of anything that lies at hand, like a prisoner honing a spoon handle into a stiletto. You fight tough, you fight dirty, but you cannot fight dirtier than it. (2)

*Borrowed Time* painstakingly records two men’s daily confrontation with mortality, and in many ways the memoir reflects aspects of Kubler-Ross’ five stages of death theory. Monette is highly self-reflexive about the denial exhibited by himself and Horwitz, and the memoirist comes to the conclusion that such denial is abundantly human and an affirmation of the human spirit to forge onward even in the face of catastrophe. Before Horwitz was diagnosed with AIDS, the two convinced themselves that his symptoms were simply the result of a persistent flu bug. They also convinced themselves that AIDS was a disease that *other* gay men contracted, and that they somehow were magically immune from the devastation of the disease (5–7). And even when Horwitz’s diagnosis was official, the pair innocently—at least during the early stages of the disease—assured themselves they would be able to defeat it. Monette writes: “There is no end to the litany of reassurance that springs to your lips to ward away the specter. They’ve caught it early; you’re fine; there’s got to be some kind of treatment. That old chestnut, the imminent breakthrough” (8).

Kubler-Ross observes that denial is common with almost all patients, not only during the early stages of illness but also later on from time to time. She notes that patients can consider the possibility of their death for a while, “but then have to put this consideration away in order to pursue life” (52). Toward that end, Monette and Horwitz avoided using the word AIDS in front of each other, although Monette eventually confided in friends about his terror of losing his lover. “I know I uttered

the word (AIDS) as a sort of reverse hex,” Monette said, “as if by daring to speak I would neutralize its power. Being scared is not the same as being convinced. Fear still has room to maneuver, and every wave of its energy goes into pushing the terrible thing away, like the ocean leaving a body on the sand” (63).

About halfway through Horwitz’s nineteen-month battle with AIDS, Monette’s denial transforms itself at times into unmanageable anger at the suffering and debasement incurred by his lover: night sweats, fevers, pneumonia, infections, and eventually blindness. And Monette’s anger was further fueled by what he perceived to be a heartless and uncaring government and media that were doing little to educate the public about the virus because it was deemed to be only a “gay disease.” Monette said he watched as AIDS became the fodder for gossip—“glib and dismissive, smutty, infantile.” He adds:

...I was beginning to witness states of denial I’d already been through, and they left a taste like dirty metal in my mouth. Gay men in the high purlieus of West Hollywood—that nexus of arts and decoration, agency, publicity, fifteen minutes in a minisport—would imply with a quaff of Perrier that AIDS was for losers. Too much sleaze, too many late nights, very non-Westside. And that’s when I started getting angry...(19)

According to Kubler-Ross, the display of anger over the patient’s predicament often follows when the stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer. At that point, the logical question becomes: “Why me?” Such anger, Kubler-Ross notes, often is displaced in a variety of directions, with doctors, nurses, family members, testing methods, and dietary restrictions the prime targets (63–64). In Monette’s case, his anger at the disease consuming Horwitz spills over into targeting government officials, mainstream journalists, and gays not willing to come out of the closet. He even, although a little ashamedly, admits to feeling anger and resentment toward people who were not ill and not afflicted with AIDS (47). Kubler-Ross asserts that a patient who is respected and understood, who is given attention and some time to cope, will soon reduce his or her level of anger. “He will know that he is a valuable human being, cared for, allowed to function at the highest possible level as long as he can” (65). However, Monette’s anger persisted when confronted with a number of doctors and nurses seemingly indifferent to the plight of gay men with AIDS (311).

From Kubler-Ross’ perspective, the anger exhibited by many terminally ill patients eventually burns out when seething proves futile, giving way to the next stage of bargaining. This phase often hinges on making an agreement with God to postpone the impending death in exchange for the patient’s promise to engage in good behavior, typically “a life dedicated to God” or “a life in the service of the

church” (93–95). However, Monette’s memoir reveals no traces of such bargaining, with the author making it clear that even in the face of Horwitz’s impending death, both men remained steadfast atheists. Monette emphasizes that their strategy was not to bargain for a miracle of additional time, but rather make the fullest use of their time together by doing the things they loved: traveling, reading, and spending time with friends.

When the terminally ill patient can no longer deny his or her plight, and anger and bargaining prove ineffective, Kubler-Ross says the next stage is often depression over the great loss about to occur. Surprisingly, Monette’s memoir displays a restrained sense of depression, with the author struggling throughout the book to ward off depression in an effort to keep Horwitz’s spirits from plummeting. Monette tells a friend that despite his lover’s dire condition and the news that he also has contracted AIDS, he feels more frantic than depressed, adding: “I could neither hold to nor project a future anymore, and the consequent dread and rage had left me wildly manic. Sometimes I could feel my heart pounding as I counted out the day’s pills from eight different vials, or ventriloquized a smile in order to talk business... If I dared to slow down or think too much I’d end up looking blankly at the ceiling...” (304).

It stands as a testament to their love that it wasn’t until the final hours of Horwitz’s life—with his brain swelling from meningitis and his temperature skyrocketing—that both men had reached the acceptance stage. Up to that point, Monette and Horwitz had refused to concede that Horwitz would die, even in the face of blindness and a steady onslaught of infections and maladies. With death on the doorstep, Monette writes, “I walked through the rest of it numb and lost, borne along by the new and ghastly rituals of separation. Yet I was curiously abstracted too, and unable to cry. The fight had gone out of me, there being no point anymore” (340).

Horwitz’s decision not to be placed in the intensive-care unit for treatment during his final hours reflects Kubler-Ross’ observation that a patient in the acceptance stage will have jettisoned his or her anger and depression over the impending death, replacing those states with calmness and acquiescence (123–24). Sadly, nine years after Horwitz’s death, Paul Monette suffered the same fate from the same disease, and likely experienced some of the same stages of dying that his friend and lover encountered.

### *Unbecoming*

While Monette’s memoir reflects key components of Kubler-Ross’ five stages of death theory, Eric Michaels’ memoir *Unbecoming* mirrors only the stages of anger, depression, and acceptance. Michaels’ anger permeates virtually every page of his account, and he accepted his fate early on because he spent most of his life feeling

like he was on an endangered species list due to entrenched homophobia. Anger in this memoir is not a phase—it is an existing condition from the point of his diagnosis to the last days of life.

In 1982, American-born anthropologist Eric Michaels went to Australia to research the impact of television on remote aboriginal communities. *Unbecoming*, published in 1990, is a brutally frank, albeit rambling account of the last year of Michaels' life as he became increasingly ill. Michaels' memoir is filled with rage not only at his plight (fevers, infections, nausea, and Kaposi's sarcoma lesions), but at the failure of medical and governmental institutions to come to terms with AIDS. A rage-filled Michaels writes:

It's getting more and more difficult to look in the mirror as the KS begins to claim my face beyond the mask of the dreadful but unavoidable beard. I shall not be able to visit the states; I won't get through customs. I won't be able to lecture, as my condition will be too horrible and revolting. I won't be able to walk down the street without attracting attention. What a nasty, nasty disease this is—relentless in its strategies, and always a step ahead of you...(49)

Along with expressing anger toward the apathy of doctors, nurses, medical researchers, and governmental bureaucrats, Michaels also declares his outrage at a gay community that in the 1980s turned apolitical and sold out to capitalism. He asserts that mass-mediated messages have convinced many gay young people that they are mainstream American consumers, "no different from any other upward socially mobile business major." Such thinking, Michaels says, lulls homosexuals into a false sense of societal acceptance, adding: "If and when we venture out of our lavender prisons, we may notice a world out there where a sizeable proportion of the population thinks we are a 'problem,' who would like to see us all disappear, and some of whom would like to help in that" (128).

Depression also reared its ugly head at various times during Michaels' final year, with the memoirist so despondent about barely being able to make it from the bed to the bathroom that he would fantasize either suicide or his funeral arrangements. "I'm sure death itself is the simplest thing in the world," Michaels writes. "The choice seems merely to be this: to arrange everything, to maintain a morbid fantasy of control, or simply give it up and let it go. The latter looks more and more appealing" (93).

Michaels' acceptance of his impending death was not only forged by his political belief that gays in intolerant America have long been marked for extinction, but also by acknowledging that his promiscuity made him vulnerable to disease. By 1976, in Austin, Texas, Michaels' life was framed by "obsessive lust," with the

author noting that having sex four times a day seemed hardly excessive. He adds: "I came to regard career—hell, even paying the rent!—as a trade-off against sexual adventurism, and eventually I had to do something to limit my hedonism" (56). Michaels ends up invoking a set of rules that insisted that he view other aspects of daily life as more important than "getting laid." Probably the fullest measure of his acceptance that he played a role in his own fate emerges in the following passage: "Just imagine how much sex there was in those 1970s that you had to make rules to distract yourself in order to get anything done: the statistics are just staggering! Surely, such opportunities arise only rarely in human history—and are bound to be abrogated by epidemic disease" (57).

### **Sex Death Enlightenment**

In the mid-1980s, Mark Matousek was an influential writer and editor at Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine. He hobnobbed with celebrities, attended trendy parties, and enveloped himself in the glitz and glamour of the New York City elite. But with friends and acquaintances of his dying from AIDS, the shallowness of his work was becoming clearer by the moment, leading Matousek to re-evaluate his life in the pursuit of something more spiritually meaningful. As Matousek put it:

The fist in my gut was getting tighter. Life at *Interview* went from maddening to intolerable. With matters of life or death closing in around me, the demands of the magazine seemed more ridiculous than ever. My pleasure at scooping my colleagues, bagging the big name...was gone for good. Let Kim Basinger give her cover to *Vanity Fair*, or walk off the end of the Brooklyn Bridge — it all felt the same to me (68).

When the feeling of hollowness became too much, Matousek quit his magazine job, survived by taking freelance assignments, and embarked on a quest for spiritual fulfillment that involved experimentation with Zen, meditation, yoga, kundalini, and even a twelve-step program for sex addicts (188–91).

The stakes for achieving spiritual enlightenment increased dramatically when Matousek was diagnosed with AIDS in April 1989. Following his diagnosis, Matousek veered between terror, numbness, "and the sense of this as a holy opportunity." He notes: "The terror burned me, caught me off guard, made everything urgent. It also pushed me on the spiritual path. I was grasping for answers as a way to save my life — if not my body — something to hold on to as the water slipped over my head" (169, 172). Matousek's memoir, *Sex Death Enlightenment*, is an account of how the viral bomb ticking inside him redirected his spiritual journey, trading in New Age fads for a personal quest to find a more authentic

means of attaining spiritual growth and enlightenment. Matousek writes:

No matter how I wanted the disease gone and the epidemic over, I could not deny the good that had come from my infection ... I was learning that responses to fate's extreme truths are necessarily complex; that the worst times are sometimes also the best; that beauty can root in the ugliest misfortune...(181)

The memoirist comes to the conclusion that if suffering is deemed a redemptive experience, then cynicism, bitterness, and depression are kept at bay.

Matousek's memoir eschews the stages approach to the dying process as enunciated by Kubler-Ross, reflecting instead Corr's holistic, task-based approach that allows a patient like Matousek to concentrate on his spiritual needs. Matousek believed that spiritual enlightenment would ease both the physical and psychological torment he faced as his disease progressed, as well as give him and his family and friends a measure of hope for a future filled with life-threatening obstacles. In fact, Corr points out that a task-based approach to dying encompasses the whole of an individual's life and is not confined merely to the terminally ill person. He states that it applies to all individuals who are drawn into the experience of dying: the dying person, family, friends, and care-givers. Corr adds:

A task-based approach explicitly recognizes the willingness or unwillingness of each coping individual to take part in a caring community. All of these people are, or can be, individuals who are coping with dying. This sharing in the lives and tasks of others is an unavoidable feature of coping with dying." (91)

A major catalyst in Matousek's quest for spiritual enlightenment was the guidance of an East Indian guru named Mother Meera, who taught Matousek to stop looking outside of himself for answers to life's perplexing questions and instead "be still and listen to the voice of my own soul, trusting that I was in good hands" (258). For Matousek, ultimately enlightenment resided not in words such as "divine," "God," or "spirit," but in simply appreciating the here, the now, and the interconnection of all things in nature and human life. He adds with childlike wonder:

What could all this be *but* divine?...What could I have imagined this earth to be but a wholly splendid miracle? I saw how deluded I'd been not to see what was right in front of my eyes; that all things in creation were holy, even the ugly, violent, and incomprehensible. What had once

appeared to me as a loose jumble of separate things now seemed to come together as one presence. (260)

### Conclusion

As artists and intellectuals facing the specter of death through the ontraction of AIDS, Monette, Michaels, and Matousek turned to memoiristic writing in an attempt to bring order and meaning to the chaos and confusion engulfing their lives. Their accounts are blunt, graphic, and harrowing, and each resonates with the human will for survival and the human need for understanding why bad things happen to good people. Monette's memoir richly reflects various aspects of Kubler-Ross' five stages of death theory, with the initial denial concerning his lover's AIDS diagnosis turning to a searing anger over the cruel debasements that characterize the disease. No evidence of bargaining for a miracle is found in Monette's memoir, and Monette manages to keep his depression under control in the name of trying to uplift his lover's sagging spirits. Eventually, Monette and his afflicted partner accept the latter's impending death, but only close to the end when the ravages of meningitis derailed all hope. Following his partner's death, Monette felt numb and lost. Kubler-Ross notes that such a reaction is typical among those who have just lost a loved one, often leading them to recede into isolation. She adds:

They not only isolate themselves from the living, but make it harder for themselves to face the reality of the person's death....It would be cruel indeed to ridicule them or to confront them daily with the unacceptable reality. It would be more helpful to understand this need and to help them separate themselves by taking them out of their isolation gradually. (184)

Meanwhile, Michaels' memoir reflects only three stages of death cited by Kubler-Ross: anger, depression, and acceptance. His anger stems from the physical debasement of AIDS and the psychic humiliation imposed by an intolerant, homophobic society. Depression also plagues the anthropologist, with Michaels finding little hope in his chances for survival. Kubler-Ross notes that depression among the terminally ill often reflects the recognition of impending losses. With the patient in the process of losing everything and everybody he loves, depression becomes a natural stage in the dying process. Kubler-Ross notes: "What we often tend to forget...is the preparatory grief that the terminally ill patient has to undergo to prepare himself for his final separation from this world" (97-100). The anger and depression exhibited by Michaels eventually gave in to acceptance — an

acceptance achieved by self-reflexively acknowledging that his promiscuity was responsible for his contracting AIDS.

Matousek's memoir, however, reflects a holistic, task-based approach to dying, rather than viewing dying as a stage process. In particular, Matousek's striving for spiritual enlightenment typifies Corr's observation that addressing the spiritual needs of the terminally ill is a vital task to be performed. He notes that the spiritual dimension in living concerns hope, a key element in coping. "Dying persons and others who are coping with dying need not be without hope," Corr writes. "They can, in fact, be hopeful...in ways that are often a source of awe to those around them. At bottom, hope involves faith and trust, again, not just in a formally religious sense. In contrast to wishing, hope is grounded in reality" (87). Through his immersion in Eastern Indian philosophy, Matousek regained hope, despite his medical plight, in the recognition of the interconnectedness of life. Infused with a philosophy that held that the "pine tree, horse, mountain, (and) me" are all fashioned from the same substance, Matousek found comfort and hope even in the face of pending death. Despite the fact that the AIDS virus was lurking in his body, the world for Matousek seemed lucid, cohesive, and live. "We had been set up to make a false choice — between our minds and our mystery," he concludes. "What a relief it was to realize now that they were the same thing" (260).

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# ***Civilization* and its Discontents: American Monomythic Structure as Historical Simulacrum**

*The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advancement of American settlement westward explain American development.*

Frederick Jackson Turner, 1893

*[The Frontier is a sphere] of ever-broadening opportunity; capitalistic, free enterprise,...[and] above all else the spread of progress.*

Walter P. Webb, 1951

*This has nothing to do with the “progress” of technology or with a rational goal for science. It is a project of political and cultural hegemony, the fantasy of a closed mental substance.*

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 1983

The packaging for *Sid Meier's Civilization III* tells the perspective buyer to “Match wits against the greatest leaders of the world in an all-out quest to build the ultimate empire and rule the world.” And, indeed, that is exactly what a player of the game, and it's two predecessors, must do. By establishing an empire, expanding into new territories, building new cities, pursuing technological and cultural advances, players attempt to create a civilization that, in the catch phrase of the first version of the game, “will stand the test of time.” Yet the manner of play, the options available to the player, the methods of achieving victory, all suggest that this popular computer simulation game is not presenting a universal narrative of the advancement of a civilization but is, rather, trafficking in the tropes of 19<sup>th</sup> century notions of geographical, cultural and technological progress. *Civilization* presents history to its players as a simulacrum of the *idea* of history. This very American historical simulacrum is one of expansion into new frontiers, of achieving a simulated manifest destiny through cultural and military hegemony, and of subduing a planet under a single, homogenous society. Thus, *Civilization* allows its players to contribute to a very specific version of the American myth of progress, especially as espoused by Frederick Jackson Turner. This is a myth of the frontier, of American Exceptionalism. It is further a myth that is individualized *to* players' desires, and individualized *by* those desires, while still reinforcing the very mythological structure through which it operates.

This is by no means a unique situation in the area of computer games, and even less so in those of *Civilization's* creator (see Appendix). A large number of games developed by *Civilization* creator Sid Meier have as their central focus some aspect of the American myth of progress. As often as not, such progress follows a very specific script drawn directly from historical events that were later mythologized and incorporated into the American monomythic structure that includes these mythopoetic ideals. An examination of this monomyth, how it is employed by Sid Meier in the *Civilization* series and other of his games helps both to explain the popularity of these games and to illustrate the continued importance of this singularly American mythological structure. Each of these important concepts can best be understood with an analysis of *Civilization* itself, which is virtually unequalled in both popularity and its presentation of this American monomythic structures<sup>1</sup>.

*Civilization* first appeared in 1991, and its sequel, *Civilization II*, in 1996. Now, with the publication of *Civilization III* in 2001, this series of games has become among the most popular strategy simulations for personal computer gaming in history (cf. *PC Gamer*, *Computer Gaming World*). This popularity can be seen in the number of "clones" of the game, created to approximate the gaming challenge found in the original concept<sup>2</sup>. Certainly a causal factor in each game's popularity is the striking exactitude with which they manage to follow the American popular historical ideas of progress. *Civilization* presents its players with a simulation of a "New World" (which can be geographically very much like Earth, or a quite different simulation), and then allows them, through the course of thousands of years of game time, to develop that world. In short, the game allows players to become masters of a simulacrum of the great American myth: The Frontier. And it is through an understanding of this American mythological structure, and its employment in the *Civilization* series (hereafter called, simply, *Civilization*), that an understanding of both this particular game's success and the continued importance of this American mythopoetic structure can be understood.

The most famous advocate of the notion of a frontier as a defining concept in American history is, of course, Frederick Jackson Turner. And, likely, if transported forward in time, that American historian would have enjoyed playing the game of *Civilization*. In 1893 Turner, only thirty-two at the time, ventured from Wisconsin to Chicago and presented his "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" at the annual American Historical Association. As Charles Beard would note in 1938, that paper was "to have a more profound influence on thought about American history than any other essay of volume ever written on the subject" (61). Indeed, the significance of "Significance" is such that, by 1993, David Wrobel would agree with Beard's earlier assessment, writing: "Turner's contribution to the study of American history is perhaps unparalleled" (3). Turner's paper became the proverbial

800-pound gorilla of American historiography in the century after it was first presented, as well as simply offering a paradigm of historical understanding that would remain immensely popular or often maligned ever since.

In his paper and subsequent essays Turner espoused the notion that the key to understanding the success of America as both a nation and a people lies in a number of important issues, all linked to a western expansion, or a continuously receding frontier. This allowed for the movement of labor, capital, and a “return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line” with “new development in that area” (Turner, 1). In *Civilization*, as well as in other Sid Meier games, these notions of expansion and a resulting level of progress through economics and technological advancement are often key elements. In *Railroad Tycoon*, for example, the player must work to create a monopolistic enterprise that allows economic control of this frontier. In *Pirates*, the player negotiates the edges of a similar frontier in the colonial Caribbean, garnering economic and social advantages for personal gain. Each of these Sid Meier games negotiates game play around and through this American mythic structure, allowing players to become part of this simulated Turnerian myth.

While it might then be possible to simply claim that *Civilization* presents a Turnerian model of historical change and progress, and leave it at that, it is important to note that Turner’s thesis wasn’t the actual birth of the idea. The frontier is a concept with far deeper origins in the American mythological structure, and this helps account for some of *Civilization*’s continuing popularity. Indeed, while Turner was perhaps the first historian to place significant emphasis on the notion of frontier in this style, he did not create the mythic structure of American historiography, but merely described it. As has been noted often since Turner, the concept of the frontier was significant long before Turner declared it so. Slotkin (*Regeneration*), traces the concept as far back at the 1600s in pre-American culture, noting that “narratives of discovery...and colonization tracts” were present almost from the beginning of American myth-making (18). The same mythological structure is inherent in *Civilization*, where the player must colonize<sup>3</sup> other areas, often supplanting other people who are there, in order to prosper in the game. Further, unless those “other people” happen to be part of a competing “civilization”<sup>4</sup> they are simply represented in the first two incarnations of *Civilization* as “barbarians” to be destroyed or conquered. In *Civilization III*, they are called, instead, “minor states” but the effect is the same.

For the player of *Civilization*, as for Turner, the frontier is that “meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Turner 18). Success, for Turner’s America and *Civilization*’s players, is determined by moving that frontier ever more outward. It is perhaps not all that surprising then that Sid Meier would follow up the success of the original *Civilization* game with a similar narrative, based strictly on such

notions, pointedly named *Colonization*. That game attempted to present native populations in a less helpless fashion and more fully realized as unique cultures. *Colonization*, however, never matched the success of *Civilization*.

While *Civilization* attempts to present a “Universal” history, then, it remains a simulacraic version of 19<sup>th</sup> century American historical thought, simulated through the mirror of Turner’s thesis. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading up to that thesis, frontier mythology played an important part in rationalizing the rise of capitalism, leading to the notion that “progress itself” could be “asserted as a positive good against the aristocratic and peasant traditions” that pre-dated America (Slotkin, *Environment*, 31). Again, a mirrored structure is available in *Civilization*. Progress (and, thus, success in game play) is determined for the player through technological advances, ranging from bronze working and writing to such concepts as philosophy, democracy, communism and capitalism. Without these “advances” in both thought and territory a player is quite literally doomed to defeat. Success for the player is largely based on finding “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of...settlement” (Turner, 15). At first it may seem ironic that *Civilization* places success in “access to undefiled, bountiful, sublime Nature” (Marx, 228), and then expects the player of this simulation to exercise control over that very area and, indeed, idea. It is, as Marx says, a unique and “distinctively American form of romantic pastoralism” (229).

At its center, then, *Civilization* is a game about a specifically defined kind of historical and socioeconomic progress. And that progress, quite simply, is measured in very specific ways. It is through technology, territorial expansion, and, usually, a move toward a more representative (albeit simulated) government that players of this simulation achieve success.

But more than simply a simulacra of the American frontier thesis, as is, say, *Railroad Tycoon*, the *Civilization* games are also an imperialistic simulacra. This simulated imperialism is presented in a number of ways, but it is through cultural, economic and military hegemony that the game player achieves the greatest success. In the first two incarnations of the game only two ways to achieve victory were allowed: military conquest of the entire simulation, or colonization of another solar system. The first path to victory depends on military strength, while the second on technological superiority. But, as with the real world, both military and technological superiority relies, in the final analysis, on economic might<sup>5</sup>. To win through military superiority a player must have the economic capital to produce sufficient numbers of military units. To win through technological advancement and eventual colonization, the player must, again, control sufficient economic capital to support research. This method of success is somewhat tempered in *Civilization III*, but victory is still dependant on one or another kind of hegemony. In the newest incarnation a game player may win through diplomacy (i.e., by becoming the

Secretary-General of a United Nations), cultural superiority, or by obtaining a “historiographical score.” Thus, even in *Civilization III*, the game player’s success is dependant upon the ability to initially dominate a frontier, and eventually turn that domination into some form of hegemonic control over the rest of the simulation.

*Civilization* does more than simply allow the game player to exist within the trope of American frontier ideology, however. An integral part of the game playing experience is the manipulation of this trope, in ways that both allow the player to alter this simulated history, and simultaneously reify it. While it remains possible for the game player to manipulate various aspects of the simulation, from the very basic such as where to build new cities or what to build in those cities, to the more complex, in the end the basic requirement of success in the game is progress. And, “in each stage of its development, the Myth of the Frontier relates the achievement of ‘progress’ to...violent action” (Slotkin, *Gunfighter*, 11). Within the American mythopoetic structure hegemony, however defined, is linked to progress and, eventually, to violence over other cultures. The same is true of *Civilization*. The player of this interactive historical simulacrum must control a simulated world, achieve hegemonic status over other cultures, and emerge victorious in the attempt to “build an empire that will stand the test of time.” To accomplish this it is necessary to use the mythological structure of the American frontier, to accept that mythology as a necessary aspect of historical change, and, in the end, to reify that ideology through the play of the game. The success of *Civilization* over the last decade is testament to excellent game design. But it is also a declaration of the continued importance of this unique American mythological structure in the popular mind of American consumers.

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### Notes

1. See “The Best 10 Games of All Time,” and “The 15 Most Significant Games of All Time” in *PC Gamer* as well as “The 150 Best Games of All Time” in *Computer Gaming World* for placement of *Civilization* in the “canon” of computer games. It has placed among the “best” computer games ever in repeated articles.
2. Quite simply, there are far too many games that offer game play based, in one way or another, on concepts originally found in the first *Civilization*. One need only enter the games section of any computer store to find titles such as *Caesar*, *Caesar II*, *Empire Earth*, various takes on the “tycoon” aspects of *Railway Tycoon*, and many others.
3. It is obvious that an entire paper based on Colonialist and postcolonialist criticism is possible of many Sid Meier games. Here I quite literally attempt to ignore such narratives in favor of the Turner hypothesis, thinking that a synthesis between the two critical positions would be, simply, disorienting for the reader.
4. The “civilizations” of *Civilization* are numerous, and increasingly more so in later versions of the game. Without listing each, however, it should be noted that generally there is a tendency toward Eurocentrism in the choice of “civilizations”, and non-European groups tend to be more reified. For example, a player may choose between Germany, France, Russia and England in Europe, but

- is presented, for the whole of east Asia, only Mongolia, China and Japan. For Africa, the only choice is the Zulu nation. In short, non-European nations are clearly "Orientalized" by the game.
5. It is important to note that frontier ideology as a mythic structure is wholly intertwined with economic hegemony (cf., Smith, 252-4). While the mythic aspects of the frontier are served by cultural ideas, economic conditions in both Turner's thesis and *Civilization* are requisite conditions in furthering that ideology.

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### Appendix

Sid Meier games that function within Turnerian ideology based on notions of the frontier and American exceptionalism. While each game listed operates under paradigms associated with the earlier games, after the original *Civilization* the "producer/developer" is usually not Meier, but other members of his team of programmers. This list is organized by date of release.

*Sid Meier's Pirates!* Microprose, 1987.

A simulation in which the player assumes the role of a Caribbean pirate during the early colonialization of the area by various European powers. Unique, in that the player does not attempt to "win" except by building wealth, social status, and rescuing various family members. Thus, the frontier tropes are only a background to other action.

*Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon*. Microprose, 1990.

Builds what will be the economic background of the *Civilization* series. The player creates a simulated network of railroads in an attempt to dominate commerce on the expanding frontier.

*Sid Meier's Civilization*. Microprose, 1991.

Brings together frontier ideology with American exceptionalism to become the formative simulation of its time.

*Sid Meier's Colonization*. Microprose, 1994.

Meier worked only in a limited capacity on this game. It attempts to create a simulation in which the player deals with various indigenous American peoples on social and cultural levels while still pursuing cultural imperialistic ideals.

*Sid Meier's Civilization II*. Microprose, 1996.

An update of the original game with some added functions.

*Sid Meier's Gettysburg*. Firaxis, 1997.

A simulation that utilizes the military aspects of *Civilization* to create a simulacra of the famous Civil War battle.

*Sid Meier's Alpha Centuri*, Firaxis, 1999.

Begins where *Civilization* ends, interstellar colonization. Otherwise based on similar paradigms as previous games.

*Sid Meier's Civilization III*, Firaxis, 2001.

The newest attempt to update to original, combining ideas from all the earlier games to create a simulation that reifies the frontier in as powerful a fashion as possible.



# Containing Multitudes: Whitman, The Working Class, and the Music of Moderate Reform

*"Be radical, be radical, be radical; but not too radical."*

-Walt Whitman to Horace Traubel (1880s)

Walt Whitman has an acute identity crisis within contemporary American culture. On the one hand, Whitman is our bard who declares the United States a "nation of nations." Poems like "O Captain, My Captain!" are ringing calls to communal memory and patriotic reflection. However, Whitman is also commonly considered our earliest "modern" poet and exhibits all the trappings of this loose title: rebelliousness, individualism in the face of the crowd, a daring use of form and subject to purvey ideals still anathema to mainstream America. Whitman molds to his situation and metamorphoses into what we want of him. On the Fourth of July, he is our drum-beating patriot. In our moments of quiet doubt, he whispers to our desires.

Undeniably, much of Whitman is radical. Beyond his unconventional form, the poet puts forth an ontological argument which calls into question our traditional understating of being and, therein, ethics. Whitman calls the U.S. "essentially the greatest poem" in his introduction to the 1855 edition to *Leaves of Grass*. He goes on to argue that "in the history of the earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir." To Whitman it is the diversity of America which makes it able to "not repel the past or what it has produced under its forms or amid other politics or the idea of castes or the old religions," but to "accept...the lesson with calmness...." This unwillingness to reject the past in conjunction with a universal acceptance of the present is personified in the American poet who is the "complete lover" of the entire "known universe." For Whitman, all that is, is holy and all that is here is transcendent. America, for the bard, is the world's ongoing poem about itself.

Though radical in form and vision, Whitman's highly egalitarian ontological and ethical system requires a unity and interrelation of many elements of early-19th century American labor reform. If America is the greatest poem, then everything within is, in effect, poetic. Nothing is to be dismissed or reduced. Even judgment is *within* the poem rather than derived from without. All conflicts and resolutions are, in effect, a product of the same poetic dynamic. Righteousness and sin, freedom and oppression, the soul and the body are all just parts of the same

churning verse. Because of this overwhelmingly unitary approach, Whitman's reform program regarding labor in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* is, by necessity, essentially moderate and often quite conservative. If the world as it is is transcendent, then everything that is, is holy. Though this makes for a radical vision, it does not make for radical politics.

A number of historians and critics have tackled the nature of Whitman's politics. Most prominently, Betty Erkkila in *Whitman the Political Poet* (1989) sought to prove that Whitman's verse was marked by a kind of radical and social political agenda. According to Erkkila, Whitman's verse stands as a cultural/ political manifesto in contrast to his American and British counterparts like Matthew Arnold who sought the transcendent sublime through the aesthetics of "sweetness and light." Whitman, instead, worked to create an art of "perfect equality": "I should demand a programme of culture...not for a single class..., but with an eye to practical life, the West, working-men...and the broad range of women also of the middle and working strata."<sup>1</sup> Erkkila, however, equates Whitman's political message with his egalitarian ontology and style. In fact, it is Whitman's egalitarian style and acceptance of America as the world's poem-in-progress which forced him into reform theories of moderation.

David Reynolds is on the forefront of the New Historicist approach to Whitman. Accordingly, his concentration in both *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988) and *Walt Whitman's America* (1995) is to interpret the text within the context of its historical and cultural influences. However, Reynolds, in both studies, concentrates on Whitman's text and the poet himself, rather than his political and reformist ramifications. Specifically, Reynolds seeks to place Whitman between "subversive" and "conventional" literature and traces ways in which the poet consciously hoped to create an art that incorporated elements of both in a new "American" art. This tactic forces Reynolds to explore interesting influences on Whitman like theater, oratory, music, religion and the visual arts, but requires that he analyze the poetic results rather than the reformist ramifications of the poet's ideas. Though Reynolds argues that politically the poet sought to create an art that would "hold together a society that was on the verge of unraveling," he claims that Whitman looked to "other cultural arenas" to provide a "restoration."<sup>2</sup> However, regarding the essential issues of the day (in this case, working-class rights) Whitman looked to America as it was in the early-1850s for political solutions.

Christopher Beach in *The Politics of Distinction: Whitman and the Discourses of Nineteenth-Century America* (1996) comes closest to considering the moderate political ramifications of Whitman's 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. In this work, Beach seeks Whitman's "ideolect" within the "sociolect" surrounding him and finds *Leaves of Grass* unmarked by any "racial social or political agenda."<sup>3</sup> Beach's work concentrates on slavery, the body, and the city, but in the latter, claims that Whitman's

politics rest upon overwhelming “ambivalence.” For Whitman, the city represented a place where “all forms of distinction...can be swept away by the poet’s active involvement in the continual flow of urban life.”<sup>4</sup> What Beach fails to argue, however, is that this ambivalence in a poet who claims to sing the verse of an entity at least partially political, “America,” is tacitly a political stand. What Beach calls ambivalent is, in fact, the political by-product of Whitman’s egalitarian ethos and ontology.

John Higham, in his collection of essays *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* (2001), sees in Whitman’s 1855 *Leaves of Grass* a “last fine frenzy of a passing era” of radicalism and experimentation. Higham goes on to claim that the poet began to “tone down the intensity and exhilaration” of his work by 1860. For Higham, the 1855 edition represents a swan song for the American cultural and political radicalism which began in the 1820s.<sup>5</sup> However, Higham confuses the messenger with the message in this work. Though Whitman’s form and philosophy are radical, the message presages what Higham calls the “process of consolidation,” but does not attribute it to Whitman’s work. Underneath the poet’s formal exuberance is a reformist tract that calls for, at most, a program of moderation and, at least, the propagation of the status quo.

### Bardic Vision

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is divided into eleven untitled poems. The first, and longest, which would eventually be titled “Song of Myself,” is the best known and most clearly describes Whitman’s ontological and ethical vision. For Whitman, all things that are, are as they should be: “the palpable is in its place/ and the impalpable is in its place (576-7).” Just as all things are in their place, so too all things are equal in status: “In all people I see myself, none more and not a barleycorn less/ And the good or bad I say of myself/ I say of them (656-658).” This is American egalitarian rhetoric taken to its extreme. Whereas most Americans had come to qualify “all men are created equal” with the demand for an “equality of opportunity” within a fluid economic order, Whitman envisioned an America in a fluctuating stasis. Specifically, Whitman has created a world where the material and spiritual are one and equal, “I believe in you my soul...the other/ I am must not abase itself to you/ And you must not be abased to the other (115-117).” And though the American poem is in a constant state of revision, “this minute that comes to me over the decillions/ There is no better than it and now (761-62).”

Here we have a flattening of being and time. The soul and body are equals; objects (physical and metaphysical) are in their place, but no hierarchy; neither the future nor the past is superior or inferior to the present. Malcolm Cowley has compared Whitman’s ontology to the spiritual egalitarianism of Hinduism<sup>6</sup>, but unlike Hinduism, Whitman makes no judgment as to the superiority or inferiority of

material objects. In fact, to over-emphasize his point that “divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever/ I touch or am touched from;” Whitman claims that “the scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer,/ this head is more than churches or bibles or creeds (828-831).” Like the ancient stoics or Spinoza, Whitman provides some comfort in the idea that things are as they should be. However, because Whitman’s thesis also requires that the “bard” be “commensurate with the people” he must celebrate the people “for their own sake as his own sake.”<sup>7</sup> Here, then, we have eleven poems that describe Americans in a snap-shot with an eye to placing them within the proper functioning of the universe. To judge their situation or status harshly would be to imply a standard outside of the system as it is. Though radical reform is a “reality,” it can claim no moral high ground vis-à-vis the situation it seeks to reform. Though conservative reform can envision a bucolic past, it is intimately a part and product of the holy present. This radical vision forced Whitman to build a very large ethical tent and, in the end, enclose all elements of America in the present. To better understand Whitman’s political-moderation-through-radical-vision, it is essential to characterize radical and conservative working-class politics within the context of America in the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century.

### **Reform: Conservative and Radical**

The growth from an artisan to an industrial economy fostered serious growing pains in American society. Specifically, it created a potential disconnect between the formerly mutually dependent distinctions of master and apprentice/ journeyman and replaced them with the seemingly unbridgeable gap between capital and labor. Coming of age in the New York of the first half of the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman lived on the forefront of this shift. Conservative and radical reformers sought to define both the laboring and capitalist classes in this new industrial order. Defining “conservative” and “radical” in this context is essential to determining Whitman’s poetic-political place in this new order.

Sean Wilentz’s seminal work *Chants Democratic* carefully explores the rise of working class politics between 1788 and 1850. According to Wilentz, working class reformers approached their plethora of issues (temperance, nativism, land reform) with a steady eye on the labor theory of value. Accordingly, this theory postulates that all wealth is derived from labor. Because of the prevalence of Marxist ideology over the last one hundred years, it is difficult to uncover this theory in politics that are often evangelical in sentiment. However, in the 1840s and 1850s, before its co-option by Marxist atheist and universalist ideology, a multi-faceted discourse on the nature of labor within the American republic could take place. The rise of an industrial working class in this context raised a number of questions: 1) What is the laborer’s relationship to the “non-producing” class of capital? 2) What is labor’s place, as a class dependent on capital and without much hope of elevation without a major shift in labor value, in the Republic? 3) And, once these

questions are answered in theory, how will labor achieve these ideals in practice? In an attempt to answer these questions, New York working class reformers fell into the broad categories of conservative and radical. Whitman, throughout the 1840s, vacillated between these two before emerging in 1855 with a new vision.

Conservative reformers sought to answer the questions raised by the shift from an artisan to industrial economy by arguing for a moderated vision of the traditional master-journeyman relationship. Specifically, whereas the master and journeyman shared one shop and common duties, capital and labor would now work in partnership with particular, exclusive means to a common end, namely, profit. This required a synergetic and mutually interested relationship between capital and labor. Accordingly, labor would find its new place in the Republic by becoming a class whose values and interests were conducive to the profitable production of goods for the economic benefit of all. This ideal would be achieved by the “uplift” of the American working class and the creation of responsible, virtuous workers. This conservative project has early origins in the American industrial revolution. The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen (founded in 1785) had, by the 1820s, become deeply influenced by the evangelical reform movements of the era and sought to establish “that systematic and methodical arrangement of business so indispensable to the good regulation of every establishment.”<sup>8</sup> Joseph Brewster represents a typical reformer of this ilk. A skilled master hatter, Brewster had, by the 1820s, declared his conversion to evangelical Christianity, been elected to the General Society, and formed, with the master book-binder Charles Starr, the Association for Moral Improvement of Young Mechanics.<sup>9</sup> This association sought to encourage the city’s laborers to fulfill their obligations “to the City and to God”<sup>10</sup> and promised employers that temperance, Christian habits and a dedication to home and church would improve their profits by twenty-five percent.<sup>11</sup> However, for these conservatives, this position was no covert attempt to secure greater profits, but rather an attempt to protect “the security of republican institutions from a drunk, corruptible electorate.”<sup>12</sup> For these reasons, the General Society founded a mechanics’ school and apprentices library for moral and educational uplift<sup>13</sup>. To conservatives like Brewster, this movement was an attempt to utilize their new-found social status by promoting an “uplift” that idealized the older, mutually beneficial relationship of master and journeyman. One prominent conservative reformer in this period declared that “what is good for the head is good for its members”<sup>14</sup> in an attempt to summarize his vision of the labor-capital relationship.

The conservative position solidified in the 1840s and 1850s. A Whig politician and sympathizer to conservative reformers, Alexander H.H. Stuart, summarized this position in a speech to the American Institute:

...We have no necessity for factory bills, or a system of legislative police to guard the operative against the exactions of his employers. Here

a competency is within reach of every man who is disposed to exercise ordinary industry and frugality; and the labouring population is prosperous and happy.<sup>15</sup>

In this address, Stuart proposed that America was essentially a classless society because of its laws against inherited privilege, that all workingmen had within their hands the means to their own improvement, that, as proof of this, New World wage earners were already prosperous compared to the Old World, and that, therein, capital's and labor's interests were the same.<sup>16</sup> This conservative approach entails an organic vision of the American economy. Specifically, it postulates that capital and labor do not have divergent interests, but are essentially serving the same end. By this argument, reform is a matter of providing means by which the working classes can improve themselves for the overall health of the republic.

Radical reformers answered the questions raised by the new economy in very different ways. Whereas conservative reformers saw industrialization as a natural outgrowth of the artisan system and therein envisioned a refined version of the master-journeyman synergetic relationship, radical reformers perceived the capitalist class as a crime against the labor theory of value and the "nobility of work." The rise of evangelical social reform in the 1820s also produced a reactionary foil in New York City. For example, in 1825, a group of small masters and journeymen artisans (shoemakers, stonemasons, printers) formed the Free Press Association to celebrate Thomas Paine's birthday and to promote speakers and distribute "freethought" works (Paine's *Theological Works* and Volney's *Ruins of Empire* among them).<sup>17</sup> However, instead of promoting rationalism only, this organization sought to warn against an "ecclesiastical threat" and claimed that "our country is saturated with...vile, pernicious tracts."<sup>18</sup> This is, in effect, a subtle first salvo against the conservative reform ideals of General Society members like Joseph Brewster and the organic reform they sought to institute.

The rational, egalitarian and "anti-clerical" efforts of these groups was bolstered by the arrival in New York of Robert Owen (1821). Owen, by this time, had achieved international fame through his work *A New View of Society* and the controversies he had fostered in the *Edinburgh Review*. Specifically, Owen claimed that manual labor was the source of wealth. By this argument, those that own but do not produce by their own labor were essentially "parasites." In addition, private property represented "unearned profit" and organized religion represented a "source of oppression."<sup>19</sup> These ideals confirmed the free thinkers' antipathy toward reform organizations like the General Society and inspired home-grown New York Owenites like Dr. Cornelius Blatchly who claimed that "labour is cheated of its true reward by power, rank, interests, rents, imposts and other impositions."<sup>20</sup>

Mike Walsh is the best and most colorful example of the radical reformist

impulse into the 1840s and 1850s. Trained as an engraver, Walsh had worked in the 1830s and 1840s as a newspaperman and had served briefly at the *Aurora* (then under the editorship of Walt Whitman). By 1840, Walsh had taken up the cause of labor reform from within the New York Democratic Party. Walsh's "Spartan Association" started as a radical fringe of the party which sought to unseat the power of Tammany politicians in the name of labor rights and the "Bowery B'hoys".<sup>21</sup> After a pilgrimage to Brook Farm in 1844 and an immersion in Fourierist theory, Walsh began to publish anti-capitalist tracts and exposés which sought to expose the wretched working conditions in the city's major industries. By 1843, Walsh was claiming that "no man can be a good political democrat without he's a good social democrat" and when accused of being a "leveler," Walsh claimed to "glory in the name."<sup>22</sup> Using the radical reformist *Subterranean* as his mouth-piece, Walsh claimed that capital is essentially "that all-grasping power which has been wrung by fraud, avarice and malice from the labor of this and all ages past."<sup>23</sup> Walsh, like Blatchly before him, saw the new capital-labor paradigm as essentially a republican economy gone awry and a new form of oppression. For radical reformers of this ilk, the questions raised by the new industrial order would be answered not by a gradual "uplift" of labor into its proper position of "body" to capital, but by a radical reform of the economy which more evenly distributed wealth according to a labor theory that envisioned the workers as the only legitimate producing class. According to Walsh in 1845, "nothing but revolution or legislation can effect the indispensable change."<sup>24</sup>

### Whitman in the Mix

Whitman was not only physically close to working-class issues in New York in the 1840s and 1850s, but was also intimately influenced by them. In 1823, when Whitman was four years old, his family relocated from rural West Hills, Long-Island to burgeoning Brooklyn. Between 1823 and 1855 Brooklyn grew from a rural hamlet to the fourth largest city in America.<sup>25</sup> This growth was due largely to the influx of workers into the greater New York area. Whitman's parents symbolized the divide that would characterize working-class reformers: his father, Walter, was an avowed Deist and devotee of Paine; his mother, Louisa, was a Quaker who was fond of taking young Walt to hear the evangelical preacher, Elias Hicks. After apprenticing as a type-setter, Whitman worked on the *Long Island Democrat* (1839). While at the *Democrat*, Whitman also published a series of editorials later collected as the *Sun Down Papers* (1839-1840). These editorials were highly political and reformist, but tackled the issues of the day with a hodgepodge of both conservative and radical sentiments. These editorials purveyed conservative issues by speaking out against the use of alcohol, caffeine and tobacco, but also questioned the certainty of religious truth and those who would claim to know it.<sup>26</sup> These early editorials,

however, present less a confusion than an individual and particular approach to the issues of the day. Unlike solidified partisans like Brewster and Walsh, Whitman's approach to reformist issues was probably as individual as most workers or citizens in a republic where the noisy fringes of the political spectrum hardly represent the individual positions of the middling masses. In these years, Whitman's politics represent his opinions on particular issues rather than a specific program.

Whitman's piecemeal approach continued into the mid- to late-1840s and the arguments remained elementally the same. Whitman's novel, *Franklin Evans* (1842), written while he worked as a printer in Manhattan, was a temperance novel overwhelmingly in support of the nominally conservative Washingtonian movement. However, he also published a poem (1847) while editor on the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which echoed radical reformist sentiments:

When earth produces, free and fair,  
 The golden waving corn;  
 When fragrant fruits perfume the air;  
 And fleecy flocks are shorn;  
 When thousand move with aching head  
 and sing this ceaseless song—  
 "We starve, we die, o, give us bread..."  
 When wealth is wrought as reasons roll,  
 When luxury from pole to pole  
 Reaps fruit of human toil  
 When from a thousand, one alone  
 in plenty rolls along;  
 There must be something wrong.

Also written during his tenure at the *Eagle* is a piece called "The Laborer" which echoed conservative reformers of the day:

If true unto thyself though wast,  
 What were the proud one's scorn to thee?  
 A feather, which though mightiest cast  
 Aside, as idle as the blast  
 The light leaf from a tree.

No: uncurb'd passions-low desires-  
 Absence of noble self-respect-  
 Death in the breast's consuming fire  
 To that high nature which aspires  
 For ever, till tis checked.

To characterize Whitman's politics in this period would be to place him near the center of the reformist issues. This does not, however, constitute a program of moderation. Between 1848 and 1850, Whitman would undergo a philosophical transformation which would allow him to see himself both outside of and intimately akin to all reform movements in America in the mid-nineteenth century. This transformation would disallow Whitman from picking and choosing from the established reformist spectrum (temperance, egalitarianism, etc.) and force him to envision a new, moderate program that essentially accepted the economic realities of the day and carved a moderate position that included many elements of both the conservative and radical programs.

### Transformations

The years between 1848 and 1855 were ones of dislocation and philosophical transformation for Whitman. The nation itself was going through similar turmoil. Democrat David Wilmot's proviso of 1846 had reopened the slavery debate and solidified free-soil politics in the North. This debate intensified in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), and its fire was only temporarily dampened by the so-called Compromise of 1850. It was to be rekindled with ferocious energy in the years following the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). By 1856, the two national parties would be split along sectional lines, the Kansas territory would be embroiled in guerilla-style civil war, and the abolitionist senator Charles Sumner would be clubbed on the floor by a representative from South Carolina, Preston Brooks. Whitman was caught up in the unraveling of the nation and was fired from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* for being one of the fifteen New York delegates who represented the Free-Soil Party in its 1848 convention. After the press for his newly founded *Brooklyn Freeman* was burned by pro-slavery advocates, Whitman moved back in with his parents and left the newspaper business altogether (1849).<sup>27</sup>

Between the years 1849 and 1855, Whitman began to concentrate on his poetry while continuing to approach political themes. His unpublished poems after 1850, "Dough-faced Song," "Blood Money," "The House of Friends," centered his anger over the Compromise of 1850 and the growing national crisis. After 1852, Whitman worked as a carpenter with his father and delved into the New York art scene. Between 1852 and 1855, he began to envision a poetry that reflected his "desire to look outside the party system for hope and restoration."<sup>28</sup> In pursuit of this aesthetic ideal, Whitman envisioned a co-mingling of all elements in a particularly American art which would seek to bind and celebrate the seemingly disparate elements of the Republic. Upon seeing the popular singing group The Hutchinsons, Whitman commented in his journal, "we want this sort of starting point from which to mold something new and true in American music."<sup>29</sup> Whitman also admired the "higher" arts when they were able to touch all classes. Upon seeing the Italian contralto

Mariella Alboni, Whitman commented that “all persons appreciated Alboni, the common crowd as well as the connoisseurs, for her the New York theaters were packed full of...young men, mechanics, ‘roughs’, etc., entirely oblivious of all except Alboni.”<sup>30</sup> Between these years, Whitman formulated a philosophy and poetic vision which would unite the nation through the celebration of its entirety. This vision would be presented by an egalitarian bard who would expose the nation’s disparate parts as a cohesive whole. This vision would also tacitly put forward an inclusive reformist program which would embrace much of both the nation’s conservative and radical elements.

### **Manifesto: The Introduction to *Leaves Of Grass* (1855)**

Whitman clearly expected his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* to have an impact far beyond that aesthetic sphere. In his introduction to the 1855 edition (which made up nearly ten percent of the book’s whole) Whitman formulated a program which included rambling, but nonetheless clear definitions of the nation, the people, the poet as a conduit between the two, and the nature of the perfect state wherein all three served the synergetic purposes. It is in this introduction, in essence a poetic/philosophical manifesto, that Whitman laid out his radical, abstract formula which was intended to have moderate, concrete results if American working-class reformers heeded them.

America, for Whitman, represents all that encompassed humankind. Specifically, its size, varied geography, and disparate populations and interests fostered a microcosm of the world itself. The poet described this nation as essentially “action united from strings necessarily blind to particulars and details magnificently moving in vast masses.”<sup>31</sup> Here, Whitman’s metaphor serves as his symbol for the seemingly discordant nation. What was interpreted by many as a broad land divided by sectionalism, country and city, rich and poor, is, in fact, a harmonious orchestra of “strings” which, in the making of the nation’s existence, is a product of the particulars, but works to create an entirely cohesive “movement.” This symphonic revision of divisive politics into a mutually-dependent whole is the essential facet of Whitman’s project.

The people in this symphony are its parts and product. Whereas other states are “indicat[ed]” by their leaders”, America is so by “the common people.”<sup>32</sup> These common people, however, are included in activities as diverse as “the coming of immigrants...the free commerce...the endless gestation of new states...the convening of Congress...the noble character of young mechanics...the factories and mercantile life and labor saving machinery...”<sup>33</sup> Here, then, we see that for Whitman, the “common people” includes every enterprise in American life. None are to be excluded from the state because the state is essentially a product of their activity. Though in the particular their interests might seem divergent, the poet “...does not

see men and women as dreams or dots," but as symbolic of the "eternity in [all] men and women."<sup>34</sup> For Whitman, the American poet must celebrate all elements of America and, in his wide arms, enclose and expose as whole what appears to be separate and conflicting.

The poet, according to Whitman, serves a purpose higher than patriotic entertainment or individual aesthetic enlightenment. He is to be the nation's "referee." With the rise of national sports in the last one-hundred years, this term raises images of a striped whistle-blower who enforces rules in a timed competition. However, Whitman's use of the term hearkens back to an earlier meaning. Between the early-eighteenth century and the rise of organized sports in the 1870s, a referee could be defined as one to whom "the management or superintendence of something is entrusted."<sup>35</sup> This is essentially Whitman's vision of himself. Namely, he has been "entrusted" to manage and purvey the unified vision of the American nation and people back to the people themselves. However, this position is not one of authority and status. In fact, the poet "is a seer, he is an individual...he is complete in himself...the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not."<sup>36</sup> The poet, then, is "Everyman" who knows that, in the national scope, all are Everyman. His only claim to authority is his knowledge that he is no better than anyone else. This total egalitarianism, coupled with a symphonic vision of the cohesive nation, will allow Whitman to propose a reformist program which will avoid the "dreams and dots" of individuals, and call for a public enlightenment as to the essential perfection of the nation in the present.

Whitman, however, does not embrace everything that exists. If he were to do so, the poet would be a mere observer rather than a visionary. For Whitman, the good state, by its nature, includes an acknowledgement of its organic and mutually-beneficial elements as well as an egalitarianism which seeks a flattening of status, and an enlightenment as to the integral, harmonious weave of the nation's different parts. This enlightenment and acknowledgement entails the acceptance that "the known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet."<sup>37</sup> This poet, however, as stated above, is no better than any other citizen. In fact, "if the savage or felon is wise it is well...if the President or chief justice is wise it is the same...if the young mechanic or framer is wise it is no more or less...if the prostitute is wise it is not more or less. The interest will come round...all will come round."<sup>38</sup> For Whitman, wisdom and enlightenment are a product of an individual, in his or her "place" and complete as him/herself, acknowledging the completely symphonic nature of the nation. This realization will force the melting away not of distinction, but of the arrogance of illusionary status and of divisive jealousy. Whitman's reform, then, incorporates some elements of both conservative (the organic) and radical (the egalitarian) reformers. What he dismisses, in essence, is their acceptance of hierarchy and the divisiveness it entails in the policies of both. These are to be

dismissed because, in Whitman's vision, they are illusions. The poet's manifesto calls not for a change of habit or a change in the distribution of wealth. It calls for a change of mind.

### **Whitman's Critique of the Labor Theory of Value**

For Whitman to express his vision in poetry he must reform the labor theory of value. As stated, the primary difference between conservative and radical reformers in the first half of the nineteenth century was a conflicting view of this labor theory. For conservatives, capital had as much if not more value than that of labor because this "class" organized and oversaw the production of a product for overall profit. By this argument, capital formed the "head" of an organic process of production. This argument inspired conservative reformers like Joseph Brewster to argue that a moral reform of the working classes would benefit the whole "body" of production. This argument, however, also embraced a hierarchy of production which placed capital in the position of those who "know."

Radicals, on the other hand, interpreted the labor theory differently. According to reformers like Mike Walsh, labor's value is a direct outgrowth of those who made a product. By this argument, capital was no better than "parasites" who wrongly profited from the sweat of the producing classes' brow. This reformist premise required the divisive politics of "haves" and "have-nots" and excluded capital from the legitimacy of the production process. Though Whitman and his new theory of value would acknowledge certain elements of the conservative and radical programs, he would emphatically deny their politics of hierarchy and divisiveness.

Whitman carefully flattens the illusion of hierarchy while maintaining the "roles" of each participant in the production process. In the poem which would become "Song of Myself," he carefully lists a seemingly disparate collection of occupations and social positions: carpenter, deacon, gentleman, connoisseur, pavingman, canal-boy, conductor, performers, drover, opium-eater, prostitute, fare-collector, floorman, and concludes the piece with "and these one and all tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them/ And such as it is to be of these...I am (257-325)." Here we see Whitman playing the "referee" he mentioned in his introduction. Specifically, the poet allows diversity to flow through him and, in the process, flattens the hierarchy that would divide them (there is no seemingly order to the list) while maintaining their individuality. In fact, the only judgment Whitman makes is when he chastises those who mock the prostitute, "miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer at you [the prostitute]." Whitman's only judgment, then, is to editorialize against the hierarchy his characters seek to impose on his list. In his poem "A Song for Occupations,"<sup>39</sup> Whitman also approaches this anti-hierarchical theme. In this piece, the poet answers the rhetorical questions of "is it

you that thought the President greater than you? or the rich better off than you? or the educated wiser than you?" with "souls of men and women!...I own publicly who you are, if nobody else owns...and see and hear you, and what you give and take;/ what is there you cannot give and take (25-31)?" For Whitman, the acceptance of hierarchy inherent in the conservative program runs anathema to his egalitarian vision. The reaction to the pomposity of moral reform in the defense of the prostitute and the rejection of wisdom-in-status in the dismissal of the President's inherent "goodness" point to the specific areas wherein Whitman parts with conservative reform.

However, Whitman has reservations about the radical program as well. Specifically he rejects the divisiveness of the radical's version of the labor theory of value. In the poem "Who Learns My Lesson Complete?", Whitman lists those who should learn his lesson: boss, journeyman, apprentice, merchant, clerk, porter, customer, editor and author, and insists, that it "is no lesson...it lets down the bars to a good lesson" and that "the great laws take and effuse without argument (5-7)." Herein, the poet rejects the fiery "lessons" of radicals like Mike Walsh and argues that there are "great laws" which "take" without debate or conflict. Whitman also embraces others that workers traditionally considered a threat to the value of labor: African-Americans. Whether a danger in the form of free blacks, or in the misty terror of "Slave Power," free-soil politics of the working-class wing of the Democratic Party viewed cheap, black labor as a threat to the dignity and profitability of their work. In "Song of Myself", Whitman rides with an African-American teamster who is "calm and commanding." Even the sun, which falls on his "crispy hair...perfect limbs" seems to acknowledge his dignity. In the end, Whitman beholds "the picturesque giant and love[s] him (217-225)." Here is Whitman, the bard whose only claim to superiority is his knowledge that he is on par and connected with everything else, communing with a worker against whom radical reformers defined themselves. This new vision required a rethinking of the labor theory of value for its hierarchical and divisive elements which, according to Whitman, clouded America's vision of its true organic and egalitarian nature.

### **The Symphonic Theory of Value**

In rejecting hierarchical and divisive reform, Whitman essentially rejected the labor theory of value. Instead, Whitman created a new theory which can be called a "symphonic" theory of value in which all elements of the production process equally contribute to create the national "movement." Therein, value is not bestowed on one who makes a product (a prospect up for varied interpretation), but is the result of all "citizens'" various "parts" in the economy and nation. Though this vision is rather novel in the economic sphere, it is not so in the political.

Political theorists as early as Aristotle envisioned the state not as made of

“other associations, not even human individuals, but the citizens.”<sup>40</sup> By this theory, “the form is higher in dignity than the matter because of its direct connection with the ‘end.’”<sup>41</sup> Though Whitman was probably not familiar with the political ramifications of Aristotle’s *Politics*, he was surely cognizant of similar echoes in James Madison’s *Federalist #10*. In this essay, Madison, in an attempt to assuage anti-Federalist fears of the potential despotism of the proposed federal government, postulated that a powerful national government would, in fact, be more conducive to the protection of national rights. Specifically, he argues that if the nation were to “extend the [political] sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests, you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens.”<sup>42</sup> Herein, Madison argues that a broadly representative national government will prevent the extremism of a particular faction by allowing for alternative “checks” through the interests of other elements within the nation. Also, this symphony of particular interests encourages the “body of citizens” to overcome “temporary and partial considerations” in the name of “true interest of their country.”<sup>43</sup> This political vision of national “interest” is not so different from Whitman’s call for individual enlightenment as to the inter-related whole of America. Whether one agrees with Madison that the Constitution has succeeded in overcoming faction and sectionalism, Whitman surely took the framer’s ideals to heart. In commenting on the radical abolitionist’s rejection of the Constitution on moral grounds, Whitman commented, “the effort to destroy our Constitution—the work of the wisest and purest statesmen ever assembled—and to dissolve the Union, is worth only of a madman and a villain.”<sup>44</sup> In this sense, Whitman’s rejection of abolitionist radicalism echoes that of his rejection of conservative and radical labor reformers. For the poet, the economy, like the nation, is a collection of equal members of a symphony working for national prosperity.

In this symphonic theory, however, Whitman uses some elements of both the radicals’ and conservatives’ programs. Specifically, the poet embraces the conservative vision of an organic economy coupled with the radicals’ program of egalitarianism. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman clearly accepts both without seeming contradiction. After listing another motley collection of “citizens” (a child, a bride, a suicide, a driver, a mob, a sickly man, a policeman, etc.), Whitman concludes that the “impassive stones...receive and return so many echoes.” In this scene, the poet senses also “the souls moving along...are they invisible while the least atom of the stones is visible (150-155)?” Here, then, the “souls” of the people are as material as the “atoms” of the stones. The pure physicality of these people are their souls, as the people themselves make up the soul of the nation. In a later section, Whitman, after celebrating the nation’s grass and land and water and air, claims that “this is the breath of laws and songs and behaviour (358-360).” Here, Whitman has envisioned an organic “nation”, as material as the natural phenomena that

frame it, "breathing" with the life of its inhabitants. However, this is not the complex, hierarchical organism of the conservative reformers. Its complexity lies in its equally important, multi-faceted parts. If it has a "head", it is the combined actions of its various parts producing a musical whole.

Whitman also embraces the egalitarianism of the radicals in his symphonic theory of value. As an organic vision is essential to his value theory, so too must every part be equally essential to the whole. In "Song of Myself," Whitman embraces "those who piddle and patter here in collars and tailed coats" as well as those who are "scrape-lipped and pipe-legged" and claims that none are "worms or fleas (1073-1075)." Additionally, in the piece later entitled "Great are the Myths," the poet calls great both "wickedness" and "goodness." Though Whitman admits that this is a seeming "paradox", it is so only in the particular. From a universal, symphonic position, "the eternal equilibrium of things is great (61-65)." Here, Whitman overtly rejects particular judgments in lieu of a national scope. From this perspective, all actions and individuals are equal in their essential contribution to the musical whole.

### **Symphonic Enlightenment**

Whitman's symphonic theory is a moderate program in that it accepts elements of both the conservative and radical programs and is novel in its reevaluation of both. Whereas conservative reformers like Brewster envisioned an organism with a "head" and "body", Whitman envisioned an organism whose head was, at most, the sum total of all workers' various actions. Whereas radical reformers like Walsh demanded a forced egalitarianism of wealth, Whitman called for an idealistic egalitarianism wherein each "section" of a symphony recognized and was recognized for its essential contribution. How, then, would Whitman's moderate vision answer the three questions raised by the advent of the industrial economy? The poet's reform is based on a change of mind rather than a change of lifestyle or distribution of wealth.

First, regarding capital/labor relations, Whitman seems to imply that there already exists a precedent as to this question, namely, relations as they now stand. In Whitman's symphonic theory, the consternation that exists between labor and capital is a product of the illusion of disparate interests. Once this illusion is exposed, both "classes" will seek mutual benefit as a means to secure national (and, inherently, personal) prosperity. Whitman, however, does not state what this future will look like as he accepts the present, symphonic "movement" as "good" in all its paradox and seeming contradiction. Second, Whitman sees labor as an essential, though not premier, element in the Republic. However, because of the nature of his symphonic theory, this element has no particular interest beyond its contribution to the national "movement." Therefore, labor's place, rather than being novel and unsettled, is already established and justified in the moment. Third, Whitman seeks

to procure this reform not through physical/financial reform, but through idealistic enlightenment. The poet's duty, in this regard, is to enlighten the citizenry as to their universality within the particular. Specifically, Whitman views himself as the messenger of the people's perfection right where they are.

Within the issue of labor reform, Whitman's program was ultimately unsatisfying. While celebrating the working class through their descriptions and occupations, Whitman's symphonic theory, but its nature, must embrace the status quo. Labor reform, with its concentration on profit and property, is inherently a concrete affair. Conservative and radical reformers, therefore, sought to define workingmen's issues concretely. Whitman, however, looked to bridge the gap between these reformers through an abstract call for an enlightenment as to the nation's "strings" and their universal, inter-dependent magnificence. However, enlightenment as to the nation's symphony doesn't immediately put bread on the table or encourage a drunkard to work. Though Whitman's moderate program would, in effect, seek compromise and reason (much as Madison envisioned his Constitution doing), it had, by its nature, no executor of laws or legislator of rules to bring about reform. Instead, it depended on its hundred-million "strings" to recognize their harmony with each other. In effect, Whitman's vision of the national "song" freezes its "instruments" in place and embraces their issues and debates as part of the national harmony without seeking to rectify their particular discord.

Whitman's 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* met with some critical success. Specifically, Ralph Waldo Emerson claimed to find "great joy in it" and said that he greeted the poet "at the beginning of a great career."<sup>45</sup> However, the first edition also met with disappointing sales. For a poet who sought to be a "referee" between the individual and the nation, this fact was an upsetting reality. In 1856, Whitman lamented in his journal that "everything I have done seems to me blank and suspicious. I doubt whether my greatest thoughts...are not shallow."<sup>46</sup> Whitman's following edition would seek to rectify these paltry sales by including poems more conventional in meter and punctuation, with titles and a compact size for portability. In this change, we can glimpse the latter Whitman of popular memory who sought an enlightenment as to the American symphony through packaging less radical and visionary. Whitman's call for a moderate program had begun to influence his radical form as he sought a broader, all-inclusive audience. This transformation would be complete with the popularization of patriotic poems like "O Captain, My Captain!" and the image of the "Good, Grey Poet" of the 1880s.

There are very few signs of Whitman's symphonic vision in American labor/capital relations today. Though similar ideals can be read into the policies of the Hoover administration's "Associationalism" or the tacit cooperation between the UAW and GM in the Detroit of the 1980s and 1990s, these, in effect, were pro-business visions veiled as mutually beneficial, organic programs. They were,

essentially, top-down reforms utterly without Whitman's ontological change of mind. Though the decline of unionism in the late-twentieth century is beyond the scope of this article, it is clear that, as of the writing of this piece, Whitman's vision of a symphonic republic and economy is still largely academic.

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### Notes

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7. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Introduction, Library of America, 1995, 7.
8. Temperance Society, "First Annual Report" *The Free Enquirer*, New York, 3/25/1829, in Wilentz, 135.
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11. Temperance Society, "First Annual Report", in Wilentz, 148.
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14. Horace Secrist, "The Anti-Auction Movement and the New York Workingmen's Party of 1829", *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, 17 (1914), in Wilentz 149-166.
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16. *Ibid*, 303.
17. Wilentz, 153
18. Correspondent, 7/7/1827, in Wilentz, 154.
19. Robert Owen, *A New View of Society*, 1817, 19-24.
20. Robert Blatchly, "Working Man's Advocate," 11/14/1829, in Wilentz 159.
21. Wilentz, 327-328.
22. Mike Walsh, "Subterranean," 3/22, 6/14, 7/25, 9/25/1845, in Wilentz 331.
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25. David Reynolds, *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 17.
26. *Ibid*, 20.
27. Reynolds, *Historical Guide to Walt Whitman*, 22-26.
28. David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, New York: Knopf Publishing, 1995, 26.
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30. Clarence Gohdes ed., *Faint Clews and Indirections: Manuscripts of Walt Whitman and His Family*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949, 19.
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32. *Ibid*, 6.
33. *Ibid*, 8.
34. *Ibid*, 9.
35. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1937, 1685.

36. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Introduction, 1855, 9.
37. *Ibid*, 11.
38. *Ibid*, 20.
39. All of Whitman's poems in the 1855 edition are without titles. All titles referred to were later added in the 1856 edition and editions thereafter.
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41. *Ibid*, 46.
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43. *Ibid*, 165.
44. Walt Whitman, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 8/26/1846.
45. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Letter to Walt Whitman, 7/21/1855, Library of America, 567.
46. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 349.

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## Reality TV: Taking the Shows To Another Level

The pedagogical importance of popular culture is getting close attention these days. In cultural studies, pedagogy cannot be separated from our students' experience of culture. One category of popular culture has its confluence in those popular elements of culture that are produced for the people such as reality television. Scholars like Henry Giroux provide a thoughtful argument for the importance of including popular culture in education. In the cultural studies tradition, Giroux argues for the necessity of reading "cultural forms as they articulate with a whole assemblage of other texts, ideologies and practices" (13).

Richard Simon also argues for the importance of introducing popular culture into the college classroom: "I come not to bury Bloom's curriculum of great books but to save it," Simon writes in *Trash Culture*:

I mean this quite seriously. At a time when professors like Bloom complain bitterly about declining enrollments in the humanities and warn that English departments are about to go the way of classics departments (shrinking to near oblivion), large numbers of students make their way into my classes, not because they love the great books of the Western world but because they love movies and television programs. And because Rambo is contemporary America's *Iliad*, they are willing to look closely at Homer (21).

Gerald Graff in *Professing Literature* discusses dialogues that acknowledge the recognition that the field of literature might be on shaky ground and that changes need to occur before English faculties fade into oblivion like their former colleagues in Greek and Latin.

To combat this deleterious effect on the English faculty, Robert Scholes urges literary studies professors to move beyond the classical canon and teach a broader range of texts. In *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline*, Scholes argues that, "the remedy is to rethink or practice by starting with the needs of our students rather than with our inherited professionalism or our personal preference" (84). This foreshadows a curriculum where English will be a discipline whose goal is to teach students a plethora of reading practices, a metamorphosis that would include a wider spectrum of texts in classrooms. This shift in pedagogy could include texts not usually considered literary genre: television, films, speeches, and even advertisements. Texts in general would be

included because they demand a broad range of reading skills and responses.

In this new-millennium pedagogy, teachers would engage students in a discussion among texts and help students negotiate the reading task closely and carefully, or in Scholes' words, "...to situate a text in relation to culture, society, the world" (166).

According to Scholes, an English curriculum must, "...lead students to a position of justified confidence in their own competence as textual consumer..." (66). He calls for a major transformation of English Literature. The overarching theme of Scholes' pedagogy is to help students bring and use in the classroom all that they have learned, and to develop in students the ability to "generate new texts, to make something that did not exist before somebody made it" (31). In other words, a television program, an advertisement, a radio script or a talk show could be viewed as a text and explicated by students thereby creating other forms of writing.

Since I have taught in both literature and communications departments, I have attempted to meld these two very different fields of study. As a teacher/researcher, I decided to explore the possibility of Scholes' argument of "generating new texts" from a broader range of texts in general, and to see if his idea could be applied to one segment of popular culture today, namely, Reality Television.

Reality television is a major component of the mass media today. The media focuses on reality programs in every form of mass media possible. The *Survivor* contestant who is voted off the show Thursday night makes a cameo appearance on *The Early Show* Friday morning. Radio disc jockeys focus on listeners who call in and predict who will be the next contestant eliminated from the show. Bookstores promote books describing the *modus operandi* of reality television shows and provide biographies of contestants, revealing how the shows' hosts employ a screening process as well as other tidbits of information.

Over a period of two semesters I have engaged students in observing the particular media phenomena called Reality Television. As part of the lesson, I explained a literary device called Freytag's Triangle and asked students to select a work of literature and superimpose the Triangle over one of the Reality Television programs.

The German critic Gustav Freytag proposed a method of analyzing plots derived from Aristotle's concept of unity of action that came to be known as "Freytag's Triangle". The Triangle is a type of literary plot analysis that outlines the movement in a story from the introduction to its conclusion, and can be employed to analyze the structure and unity of a text's plot. This literary device worked well when I employed it in teaching literature, but I was curious to see if the Triangle would work in the context of a television program, and specifically, reality television shows.

Reality television is a recent and popular American TV type of programming whose contents, in the main, appeal to the younger generation, specifically, Generation X, but a wider viewing audience also seems to be emerging. It can be defined as "...broadcast shows with a non-fiction basis" (Vivian 505). *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, *Temptation Island* and MTV's *The Real World*, who pioneered their programs over the last twelve years, belong in this category.

A significant majority of the public finds it more interesting to watch real people without a script than to view most sitcoms and dramas. They usually enjoy the idea that anything is possible on reality television programs, and the suspense of what will happen next keeps its audience intrigued (Peysner 1).

The initial allure appears to be that the programs are unique and different from the routine sit-coms and drama series of the past, but a closer analysis reveals other reasons. There is usually a villain, which adds authenticity and validity to the unfolding action. Conflicts often arise and need to be resolved. No one, not even the directors, is sure of the resolution or denouement at the programs' conclusions. Furthermore, the audience often relates to the weaknesses and inadequacies of the contestants; thus, it may serve as a catharsis for the everyday problems of its viewers.

I have selected several excerpts of students' writing that compare a work of fiction with a Reality TV program, and then superimpose Freytag's Triangle over the plot of the reality show. The students were enrolled in the Communications and Culture course I teach at Holy Family College, a small liberal arts institution located in Philadelphia.

A student named Patricia selected the reality show *Big Brother*, whose participants are invited to stay in a house without any outside intervention:

*Big Brother* (the viewing audience) is the only link to the outside world. Daily life is recorded by cameras, strategically placed throughout the house, and conflict arises as the different personalities materialize and clash. The isolation and seclusion of the contestants appear to contribute to the conflict. Each week the participants are polled and asked to cast someone out of the house. Their motivations are presented to the audience (*Big Brother*) and a decision is reached. The process is interactive; the audience is surveyed for the ultimate determination. The elimination continues each week until a winner is awarded a million dollar prize.

In relation to Freytag's Triangle, the exposition stage commences after the screening process as the participants in the show are selected. The contestants do not know each other prior to the show, but share the same motivation. They meet for the first time at the house. The tension builds as the contestants begin to feel more comfortable with their surroundings. They become less conscious of the cameras and begin to interact with one another.

Sometimes, a particular character in the house produces conflict and the house members lash out at each other. The action peaks when the crisis heightens. At the close of each week, the contestants are asked to resolve the problem by voting to send someone out of the house. Once the decision is made and the contestant is banished, the remaining members discuss the issue and seem to develop from the experience.

In comparison, George Orwell's *1984* presents a totalitarian society in which *Big Brother* censors all behavior. The reality TV show allows the audience (*Big Brother*) to view every move the participants in the house make. All of the conflicts, arguments and tension within the house become a matter of public record. Essentially, the viewers have access to the participants' innermost thoughts. Nothing is reserved. The house becomes a fishbowl society where the final decisions are made by *Big Brother*.

Orwell presents a society where everyone becomes slaves of the government to achieve a more orderly society. Similarly, house members give up their right to freedom, to establish some form of order within their confines to attain their ultimate goal—wealth. Those who refuse to cooperate are banished.

Joseph chose the reality show *Survivor*, comparing it to Agatha Christie's classic, *And Then There Were None*:

The main comparison appears as each contestant/character is systematically taken out of the action. The contestants on *Survivor* are like characters in Christie's novel: all come from different backgrounds and classes of society. There are sixteen contestants in *Survivor* and ten in Christie's drama, but they each face the same outcome, albeit in Christie's, more horrifically. *Survivor* contestants are made to face certain challenges that lead to the result of one being voted off the island. In the drama, ten people are tricked into coming to an old house only to be killed, one by one, according to a macabre poem that hangs on the wall.

Each week in the reality show, a survivor is voted off after a series of competitions until only one wins, and claims a million dollar prize. In the drama, *And Then There Were None*, ten people are summoned to a deserted house, where one by one they are murdered until only one remains alive. Though the means are certainly different, the end is the same: individuals leave the story, slowly but surely, one at a time.

Danny viewed Freytag's Triangle as a way to compare the reality show *Big*

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*Brother 2* with Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. In the conclusion of his essay, he writes:

Freytag's Triangle, a literary plot guide, can be used not only as a help to writers of books, but also to producers of reality shows such as *Big Brother 2*. Life is much like a novel; the fact that a real-life situation follows so closely to a novel written over forty years ago says a lot about the validity of literature as being a near-reality story in itself.

Karyn chose to compare *The Real World* to the fairy tale genre:

In the show seven young adults are plucked from their ordinary worlds, many of which are less than desirable to begin with, and placed into a dream world. Living in a beautiful house, presented with an interesting job, living on a fake, provided income, and basically living just a perfect life with the one consequence of having it taped, is the only responsibility of the casts' members.

The series resembles a fairy tale in that in the beginning everything is strange to the characters. The characters then pass through a quest or conflict in which they must win, despite the obstacles. Sometimes they become ill. All of the conflicts gradually resolve, and by the end, everyone lives happily, or at least, we are led to believe they live "happily ever after."

Karyn chose to answer the question I posed as a postscript to the assignment: "Is there any redeeming value in the reality television program you wrote about? All of the students answered adamantly, "No." However, Karen added,

I see nothing wrong with my view. I enjoy shows that are less than enlightening. But I do not think a reality television show has to be considered great TV or that it has to be socially beneficial.

A student named Liesl does not see much of a redeeming quality about the reality show *Temptation Island*; nevertheless, she also enjoys watching this type of reality television program:

However, I do not see this as a decision as to whether it is something the public viewing audience should or should not watch, because if one likes this type of entertainment then one should feel free to sit back and

watch strangers do the unthinkable on national television. There is only so much of what's going to be aired on television anyway, since certain words and actions will not be presented on the show.

I could not pinpoint any specific literature to this reality show, but I would compare it to a romance novel that has a subplot of a twisted or extra-marital affair. The juicy details, the illicit love affairs, people cheating and all those other fun aspects that viewers love to sink their teeth into, are all there.

After all, in the end, *Temptation Island* is more like a Cinderella fairytale. The prince sweeps his princess to a far-a-way land, disappears, and then comes back on his white horse and rescues the woman he loves.

Freytag's Triangle is a helpful tool for analyzing works of literature. Asking students to reflect on a literary device such as Freytag's Triangle in relation to popular culture (in this study, reality shows) enables students to gain some degree of what Robert Scholes calls "textual power, which is the ability to...generate new texts, to make something that did not exist before somebody made it" (131).

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## *Studies in Popular Culture*

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