Volume 17, Number 2 Summer 2006

## 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.

Thank you all, Felicia F. Campbell University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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### From the Editor's Desk

As I look over this issue of PCR, I am struck once again by how diverse the faces of popular culture study are and how important it is to recognize them if we are to attempt to understand ourselves in our popular-culture-saturated environment. Sex, gender, transgender, race, the media, comics, environment and athletics in our love/hate affair with mountains, architecture and the worldwide gaming culture, and an ancient people in India transmitting gentle values through their music have all found their places in this issue.

In our lead essay "Pornumentaries and Sexploitation: The Cultural Signs of Sex," Daniel Ferreras continues the discussion that made his keynote address at the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the FWPCA/ACA one of the most praised and talked about in our history. In it, he argues that the increasingly explicit sexual representations that we see around us every day are an unhealthy result of "our current neo-conservative climate," drawing on film, literature, and television as well as Christian iconography to make his point.

Writing from Thailand, Arthur Saniotis in "Gendered Ambivalence: Representations of *kathoey* in Thailand" discusses the ways in which *kathoey* (lady-boys) influence their society, setting an ideal for female beauty yet often discriminated against, something often reflected in film. A number of his points reinforce those of Ferreras in another social context.

In "'It's My Body and I'll Show It If I Want To': The Politics of Language in the Autobiographies of Dorothy Dandridge, Diahann Carroll, and Whoopi Goldberg," Kwakiutl Dreher tackles race and gender, stressing Goldberg's refreshing in-your-face style as it attacks head-on the sorts of hypocrisies that Ferreras deplores and ambivalences that Saniotis describes in the *kathoey* world.

A different kind of popular culture comes to the fore in Satish Sharma's "Carriers of Popular Indian Culture: The Bauls of Bengal." Far from Bollywood, the Bauls ("free people" in Sanskrit), live happily unbothered by the hypocrisies of the larger world, eschewing false piety, earning their living by singing and dancing in the streets, showing by example the resiliency of their form of popular culture. Their ancient songs can be a lesson to us all.

Moving in another direction, Robert Duff and Larry Hong examine the growth of Macau's gaming industry in "Recreating Macau in the Image of Las Vegas: Will Cultural Globalization Come Home to Roost?" As Macau has been busily recreating itself as Las Vegas since an influx of big money after the Chinese takeover in 2002, the authors wonder if Las Vegas will be forced to reinvent itself to remain competitive with Asian gamblers.

Moving to the natural environment in "Man(kind) Vs. Mountain," adventurer-scholar Armand Singer gives a succinct, but comprehensive, look at

our relationships with mountains through history, culminating with our contemporary sense of oneness and acceptance of the mountain environment. He must be right. I'm looking at Red Rock Canyon from my window as I write.

Many of us began to have some renewed hope for journalism as reporters dropped their seeming objectivity and became involved with the situation during Katrina. In "The New Journalism of the Sixties: Reevaluating Objective Reality and Conventional Journalistic Practice," Dennis Russell explains that "only by using entire scenes, extended dialogue, the point of view of characters, and interior monologue, could writers like Didion, Wolfe, Thompson, Mailer, and Herr attempt to come to terms with the widening social chasms of the Sixties." He gives us an insightful look at the time and practitioners; we can only hope for a new group for our chaotic time.

In "When Fiction Becomes Reality: Authorial Voice in *The Door in the Floor, Secret Window*, and *Swimming Pool*, Jan Whitt examines these three films, all drawn from literature, dealing, as she says, "with the role of imagination in story telling, with distinctions between genius and madness in the creative process, and with meta-fiction, or the way in which literary and visual texts about languages and images comment upon themselves."

Finally, we have William Petty's last essay, "Narrative Transformation: Jonathan Lethem's *Men and Cartoons* Comic Books and Geek Culture," a marvelously insightful look into just that. Sadly, William died unexpectedly shortly after his piece was accepted for inclusion in this journal. He had published three other articles with us, and, with his twin brother John, faithfully attended our conferences. We will miss him.

### **Nuts and Bolts**

If you missed Laurens Tan's "Risk as Pleasure" article in a previous issue, you will find it in a slightly different incarnation in the Appendix. Some errors had crept into the earlier version that he wanted to correct, which he did. So here it is.

You may have noticed that we have begun to run book reviews. Here is a wonderful chance to have your book reviewed or to review one that you think we should know about. Query first if you have a read a book that you feel is appropriate; chances are we will be interested.

PCR has a new address. It's popular.culture.review@gmail.com. This is the perfect time to remind you that the journal is now all-electronic: all requests and submissions are done through email.

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## Pornumentaries and Sexploitation: The Cultural Signs of Sex

The signs of sex permeate our increasingly visual cultural environment. Whether directly or implicitly, representations of sex are virtually inescapable in today's society, in spite of (or precisely because of) our current neo-conservative climate. Advertisements, TV shows, films, all contribute to the creation of a pervasive, if only suggested, sexual narration which, strangely enough, has not yet benefited from the scholarly approach it deserves. It is a given that repressed sex does not disappear; on the contrary, it manifests itself in a variety of settings and through a myriad of symbols, more or less obvious; therefore, it becomes silent, unspoken sex, which reveals its voice when interpreted from a cultural point of view. Repressed sex, in the end, appears to be much louder and disturbing than it would be in a healthier, more open context and becomes a weapon of manipulation to serve corporative financial gain. Although our modern concepts of sex were born in the nineteenth century (in 1869, to be exact<sup>1</sup>) it seems logical to start our discussion with religious iconography, for the prohibition of sex in our society is intimately related to judeo-christian morality. I will then trace this tendency through a few key cultural artifacts, including literary and cinematic works, as well as popular TV programs, in order to show how the prohibition of sex has become a necessary condition for its blatant exploitation.

John Paul II literally turned the Vatican into a sainthood factory. During his tenure at the headquarters of Catholic Inc., he beatified 1,340 individuals and canonized more candidates than all popes combined during the last 500 years.<sup>2</sup> The intent clearly was to provide the catholic church with new heroes, as well as grossly vast sums of money since the procedures of beatification and canonization cost in the neighborhood of half a million euros or dollars, depending on which bank arranges the transaction.<sup>3</sup> Although John Paul II appeared to be fairly open minded when it came to beatification, accepting individuals from all walks of life, one constant remained: the candidate to beatification had to have been sexually irreproachable. Even secular individuals were considered, but only as long as they had left their families; that is to say, eternal life was only promised to those with no sexual life, thus perpetuating the long tradition of aggrandizing total sexual repression, a characteristic of the catholic church. The connection between the prohibition of sex and its financial exploitation is therefore easily established from the very start within the house of the lord; what must be emphasized, however, is that the narration of sex is present at the very core of catholic iconography in a subverted way, demonstrating further the undeniable relationship between sexual prohibition and perversion. For instance, from an objective, scholarly point of view, the figure of the crucifixion is a very realistic and titillating

sadomasochistic scene that involves nails and an almost naked man. In the eighteenth century, Sade made no mistakes about it and joyfully recycled the whole affair in more than one memorable and voluptuous orgy. In a more subdued, contained manner, the film *Priest*, which tells the story of a homosexual catholic priest in England, also points to the same sensual evidence: the protagonist, a sincerely fervent believer, tries desperately to pray to a life-size crucifix but cannot avoid being aroused by the exposed, luscious thighs of the savior. The protagonist faces a serious dilemma of which he is barely conscious: the most symbolic visual microstructure of his religion has the power to stimulate his sexual hunger. Naturally, prayer, then, gives all its value to the term "sacrifice."

The power and violence of the implicit sexual tension contained within christian iconography transcends geographical and cultural barriers, as is shown by the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, who (in his Confessions of a Mask) mentions a reproduction of "The Martyrdom of San Sebastian" as a key moment in his sexual evolution. The young and blonde ephebus tied to a tree and transpierced by several arrows is, indeed, irresistible and has become a cultural staple within the contemporary gay community, as he was during the Italian renaissance. Furthermore, and in socio-cultural terms, the endless strain of pedophilia scandals which lately have stained the catholic church could be partly explained in semiotic terms by the imagery of the church itself. As a woman, the virgin Mary is denied feminine form, cloaked in shapeless garb, and exists only as the ideal anti-sexual being: she is the immaculate conception; that is to say, the only way to resolve the sticky problem of sexual activity. She is reduced to a mere function, that of asexually producing the savior. On the other hand, little angels—theologically speaking, sexless by definition—that ornament churches tend to be entirely nude; furthermore, one can easily catch glimpses of their perfectly round and adorable cheeks in between the lyres and the clouds. In other words, the only visual presence of flesh in the catholic universe is that of naked little angels. After a few centuries of this iconographic diet-bondage, torture, symbolic penetrations by pointy objects, and naked little angels on the ceiling—the catholic unconscious logically turns to pedophilia. Needless to say, cherubs do figure on the menu of more than one very graphic Sadian episode, a figure of speech which leads us to consider the mystery of transubstantiation. hence adding anthropophagi and vampirism to the list above. The vampire narration includes many sexual elements, among which a virgin and her blood, the blood of her son, and a reflection of the christian hidden sexual narration which also involves a virgin: Mary.

The narration of sex is to be found thus in the most unlikely—although holy—places, demonstrating once again that repression of sex, rather than silencing it, tends to stimulate its expression in a covert, perverted manner and to favor its exploitation. Sade's generation, that of the French Revolution, openly rejected the church and its prohibitions and went on to produce the most daring libertine literature. But, as we have seen, even Sade himself drew

inspiration from christian iconography, and his work, however perverted it might appear to be, remains at the textual level and therefore is much more open to interpretation than the visual representation of a young man nailed to a cross. In addition, much of Sade's most spectacular displays of sexual excess often defied various physical laws of the universe, often many at once, and almost always the law of gravity. In the physical world we occupy, such intricate arrangements of bodies and sensual activities simply cannot be done; all participants, heroes and victims alike, would seriously hurt themselves but not intentionally, unlike the main villain in Dan Brown's bestseller, The Da Vinci Code. This character happens to be a member of the Opus Dei—the catholic order created by the Spanish dictator's (Franco) spiritual councilor, Escriva de Balaguer, who was canonized by John Paul II—and practices self-flagellation on a daily basis, thus following a long catholic tradition of physical mortification which is in itself highly suspicious. Santa Teresa of Avila, one of the most famous figures in Spanish mysticism, describes a state of ecstasy due to selfinflicted tortures which can easily be compared to that of an orgasm. In this case, Saint Teresa fulfills both roles of the typical sadomasochistic activity, being at the same time dominatrix and submissive, and apparently, enjoying both equally.

As the Industrial Revolution progressed and libertine ideals were crushed by bourgeois morals, the open narration of sex became the sole property of doctors, counselors, and smut peddlers. Sex went unsaid, and "to ejaculate" in the adventures of Sherlock Holmes never meant anything more than to exclaim. As the epitome of law, order, rationality, and positivism he was never interested in establishing any type of communication with the fairer sex. The only woman who ever seemed to have an affect on Holmes was Irene Adler, one of the protagonists of "The Adventure of a Scandal in Bohemia," from The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. In the story, Holmes is hired by an anonymous foreign dignitary to retrieve some compromising documents which have been stolen by Irene. Surprisingly enough, Holmes will lose the case, accept his defeat, and always remember Irene with the utmost admiration, keeping a photograph of her to which he will refer as "the Woman." This particular tale reveals the relationship of Puritan morals and fetishism, for the great detective obviously represses his attraction toward the young lady, preferring to mentally masturbate in front of her photograph, along with his loyal sidekick, the very decent Dr. Watson. At the turn of the century, however, as the Victorian era draws to an end, the verb "to ejaculate" will disappear altogether from the adventures of the illustrious sleuth to be replaced by "to exclaim" or "to cry out," thus indicating that by then, "to ejaculate" came to mean something else, something of very little interest in the sexless universe of the great detective.

The Industrial Revolution not only established bourgeois morality and institutionalized the prohibition of an open sexual narrative, it also consolidated the ties between sexual imagery and financial exploitation. In the logic of modern capitalism, needs have to be created in order to promote consumption,<sup>6</sup>

and the repression of sexual expression has naturally created a desire for it which will never be satisfied; as a direct result, the signs of sex have become advertising strategies in a more or less obvious way. It is a known fact that any beer advertisement must suggest the notion of young female company and exciting nightlife encounters with promising developments in sight. It is less often observed that any commercial for watches will always present the hands in the 10:10 position, hence suggesting a "V," semiotically an idealized representation of the female genitalia. One particular advertisement for a salad dressing from a few years ago showed a female hand with red-painted nails shaking a bottle of salad dressing over a deep dish filled with tomatoes and lettuce, the camera focused only on the hand and the neck of the bottle, and the young lady shook the bottle in a regular motion, spreading little streams of dressing on the salad in a very suggestive fashion. The phallic symbol, as well as its stimulation leading to a happy conclusion, is as apparent in any soft drink commercial, where the can or bottle, generally shown in an inclined position, floods the screen with white foam, constituting a clear, barely metaphorical, eiaculation.

When it comes to more official narrations, such as films or documentaries, the exploitation of the sexual theme has become more apparent throughout the nineties, spawning a variety of works which have in common a more or less direct representation of explicit sex. The now common, if not vulgar, expression of "the money shot" is best illustrated by the 1992 highly successful film, *Basic Instinct*, and its famous interrogation scene during which the concentrated spectator could catch a glimpse of Sharon Stone's pubic hair. Allegedly, the actress wanted to have these few nanoseconds cut during editing; however, the director refused, stating that "this shot will make you a star" (Paul Verhoeven's own words in *Cutting Edge: the Magic of Movie Editing*). There is no doubt that Verhoeven was correct in his judgment and this not-so-original thriller went on to become an international success mainly because it offered a moment of explicit sex, however ridiculously short it may have been.

Films such as Rated X, Boogie Nights, and The People vs. Larry Flynt directly tackle the subject of pornography and much of their narrative tension is a sexual one; we are so hungry for the narration of sex that these works effortlessly establish narrative authority thanks to their subject matter, offering the possibility of indulging in the notion of pornography without having to enter the shady world of real triple X features. Yet again, we encounter the negative connotations associated with the representation of explicit sex in our society, for self destruction and loss of dignity are common narrative motifs to all three films, along with drugs and generally dangerous lifestyles for which the characters will be punished. The fact that Rated X and The People vs. Larry Flynt are based on true events and personalities demonstrates that the association of sex with illegality has naturally blurred the distinction between sexual activity and crime; not only does having a sexual life disqualify us from the possibility of postulating for sainthood, it also condemns us to a life of drug

abuse and violence. In reality, sex only becomes dangerous when it turns into a business, for it drives its actors—never better said—being associated from the very start with a barely legal and definitely immoral enterprise, to push the laws to their limits; bourgeois morality is above all a matter of appearances, which, with the help of a few good lawyers, can be perfectly accommodating with any profitable industry. And smut is no exception.

Wonderland follows the same model as the films mentioned above; however, its complex narrative structure, which switches points of view and presents the story under different angles, makes it an aesthetically successful film which could maintain the same narrative authority without the character of John Holmes at the very center of the plot. It is not a film dedicated to exploit the life and times of the first big international porn star, but a well-directed thriller that interprets the tragic killings of Wonderland. However, it implicitly shows that a socio-economic history of the multi-billon dollar triple X industry, the most exemplary exploitation of sexual repression, remains to be established.

It appears that the establishment began losing interest in pursuing smut peddlers after the eighties, most likely sensing that the business of porn would produce large revenues in terms of licenses and taxes. Indeed, pornographic movie sales and rentals about tripled throughout the nineties, jumping from 1.6 to 4.2 billon dollars. Our incapacity to face sex not only prevents us from articulating a healthy and aesthetically satisfying sexual narration, it also allows the pornographic industry to thrive, for it answers a primordial need, albeit in a perverted way; in this, modern pornography and traditional catholic iconography are surprisingly similar, although it could be argued than straight pornography from the golden age of porno-chic is probably healthier than penetrations from nails or arrows.7 But the night is young and the new means of visual reproduction, including the Net, are most promising in terms of perverted sexual narration, which is why Penley's position is hardly acceptable when she states that "Every single thing that you can see in a porn film today, they were doing right back at the beginning of porn."8 She argues her point mentioning the presence of spanking, sex toys, and putting on rubbers in the porno d'époque (twenties, thirties, forties) insisting that the latter was just as hardcore as it today. As if by some miracle, the dirty pictures industry had escaped from the changes necessary for the survival of any business within the capitalistic system—even the Vatican had to revise its financial policies in order to remain competitive in the commerce of sainthood—it's fair to assume that the great smut peddlers did just the same. Furthermore, the visual representations of sadomasochism, extreme bondage, and pain, as well as water sports and coprophilia, are born out of the late seventies and early eighties, when the era of porno-chic ends and video appears, alongside the possibility for virtually anyone to manufacture and distribute smut. Video technology, and more recently, digital transfer, also allows individuals to welcome pornography into the comfort of their own homes rather than having to frequent theaters, therefore minimizing their contact with the real world of pornography and saving their sacrosanct bourgeois appearances. Penley's statement—which is both naive and misinformed—blatantly disregards one of the most significant aspects of the industry: exploitation. Pornography follows predictable economic trends, among which are growth and consolidation; during the late nineties, one could subscribe to different porn channels serving different "genres": contemporary, amateur, and classic. By 2001, all three channels had merged and offered exactly the same type of so-called "adult entertainment." In the name of constantly increasing benefit, monopolization and lack of control have created the ideal conditions for human exploitation, very much in the manner of the Waldon family, and it is at best wishful thinking and at worst guilty ignorance to believe that the porn industry has been spared. 10

Penley's position also denotes the situation of the film scholar caught in the legitimization process of sexual exploitation: would a film professor get tenure, even in California, if she specialized in pornography? As a result, we just do not know much about the trade, and that is why a new trend of documentaries has appeared within the last ten years. Rockumentaries were created to answer the need of the MTV generation; we now have pornumentaries, in order to allow us to enjoy pornography without challenging our ingrained bourgeois morals by frequenting some seedy establishment. The success of the recent film Inside Deep Throat, which openly exploits the original film, demonstrates that if a society implicitly condemns pornography at large, it is on the other hand always ready to speak of pornography. One of the most appealing sides of the Lewinsky scandal for the media was that it permitted everyone to speak openly about oral sex; it was morally legitimate, if only for a few weeks, to openly debate questions about sex: does fellatio mean having sex or does having sex necessarily involve fellatio? Our fascination with the president's adventures in the oral office was proportional to our social impossibility of discussing fellatio in normal, modest times.

Pornumentaries come in different flavors, to better suit our decent curiosity according to our personal preferences. A program such as HBO's Real Sex is originally marketed to those interested in a candid look at some accepted, if atypical, sexual practices; those might include mud playing, mild bondage and sensorial deprivation, exhibitionism, rubber fetishes, etc. In some segments, real-life individuals share with the viewers their particular sensual turn on, and in others, we are introduced to a behind-the-scenes look at a sexual enterprise. such as adult movie making or sex toy manufacturing. It should be noted that most of the interviewees display a quite arrogant demeanor, commenting upon their sexual habits as if they were participating in some transcendental endeavor. The prohibition of sexual expression is so inherent to our society that anyone daring to share with a late night cable audience that he/she loves the smell of broccoli while making love automatically acquires a certain superiority over those unfortunate squares who dare not to speak of sex. Sexual expression is thus reduced to self-important exhibitionism solely dedicated to increase network cable profits. Over the years, Real Sex has spawned subcategories, thus showing the existence of an increasingly consolidated target audience. *Real Sex: Pornucopia*, for instance, is solely devoted to the pornographic industry. One episode showed an in-depth interview with an artificially enhanced super-porn star, Katie Morgan; the actress did most of the interview naked, sitting on a chair, and the program was generously sprinkled with segments from her full-length features, yet another way to indirectly let the viewer enjoy the pornographic experience.

For a more romantic, poetically oriented audience, there is Kim Cattrall: Sexual Intelligence, which, as the title indicates, tackles the subject of explicit sex in a more sophisticated manner and with a healthy dose of metaphysical concepts in order to ease the sensitive soul into the expression of his/her primordial instincts. Most of Cattrall's narrative is empty of real meaning other than, as the poet would put it, "Sex is natural, sex is good, not everybody does it but everybody should." One senses here the need to reconcile a feminine audience with the possibility of sexual expression and the choice of Kim Cattrall is far from being innocent. As Samantha in Sex and the City, she embodied the epitome of the sexually-active, economically-independent modern woman who is not afraid of externalizing her desire and is absolutely not frustrated. The entire series was indeed based on the concept of sexual expression, already included in the title, and the only narrative tension these familiar soap-type plots could offer was based upon the expression of sexuality, which was enough in itself to justify the very existence of the show. Indeed, except discussing shoes and penis sizes, the four main characters of Sex and the City truly have nothing to say. But in a cultural landscape where explicit sexual expression has been confined to the shady side, any representation of sex, however shallow and insipid it may be, is always welcome.11 Incidentally, we again find the same condescending tone from the interviewees in Sexual Intelligence as we observed in Real Sex; actually speaking of sex in an open manner is obviously a feat no one should ignore.

At the other end of the spectrum, for those who prefer to get as close as possible to the real thing, we find shows and features such as Taxi Cab Confessions and Pimps Up, Hoes Down. The former presents supposedly spontaneous, candid conversations between a taxi cab driver and his customer(s); it goes without saying that the interaction is almost invariably centered around more or less original sexual activities. Often, we simply witness a fairly vulgar, uninteresting interaction, both in tone and choice of words; however, the show functions thanks to the notion of reality TV which allows the viewers to get a close look at the gutter without getting their feet dirty. Pimps Up, Hoes Down is arguably one of the most repugnant cases of sexploitation, for, under the pretext of an objective, informative documentary, we are introduced to the wonderful world of pimping and prostitution. The financial, as well as moral, misery of fellow human beings becomes a titillating spectacle, the only object of which, yet once again, is to generate revenue for the cable company. Here, we witness what could be considered as one of the most

pernicious side effects of sexual expression prohibition: our desire to enter into a sender/destinatary relationship in order to exchange, or at least to receive, sexually explicit information prevents us from perceiving the human side of obvious sociological disasters, such as the lives of most prostitutes. Furthermore, the direct exploitation of sex through pimping is not even denounced, if only in financial terms; the viewer is left uninformed of the percentage of the take the pimp receives for every trick his "employee" does. To the contrary, we are invited to see a "Pimp Award Ceremony," therefore contributing to present pimping as all but a glamorous activity. Sexploitation here operates at two levels: the pimp exploits the prostitute and the cable network exploits our frustrated need for explicit sexual narration. In the end, there is no room left for a necessary sociological critique; hence, we render mundane the spectacle of sex for sale, as if this association were part of a vague natural order.

Hookers at the Point could be considered as a fusion between the two shows previously discussed: candid conversations about sex but with prostitutes from all walks of the trade. This particular pornumentary is probably the grittiest of them all and retains some shreds of cultural dignity precisely because of its harshness. Regardless of how much we enjoy having a direct view upon a prostitute's adventures, a thirty year old woman explaining seriously to the camera that her only way out is probably suicide tends to calm ardors significantly. There is no doubt that this show, as the others do, preys upon our needs for sexual narration; however, in the present case, the sexploitation is limited by its irremediably informative nature. It could be said that, instead of selling sex directly, Hookers at the Point sells sexual disasters, and hence, forces us to consider external factors to just sensual arousal.

All the visual artifacts mentioned above, films and pornumentaries alike, participate in a generally voyeuristic tendency which has developed exponentially throughout the second half of the twentieth century, thanks to the multiplication of visual media and their increased accessibility. It is no surprise to observe that a new type of exhibitionism has appeared with the possibilities now open with the use of webcams and personal websites, and it was naturally just a matter of time before it became tied to sexploitation. As of today, internet sex sites gross a revenue of about \$2 billion a year. Furthermore, there are literally thousands of North American couples who broadcast their sex lives on the net for a reasonable fee of about \$15 to \$20 a month. We are confronted here by a new type of spectacularized prostitution as well as by the loss of the individual values of intimacy and privacy. The system of sexploitation has convinced some of us to turn our own sex lives into a spectacle, turning our desire and fantasies to generating profits from casual onlookers. In a desperate attempt to disguise the exploitation behind exploration, one internet consultant has recently declared<sup>12</sup> that web-sex allows people to explore their sexuality without the risk of real life encounters, empowering them to "have a private connection with someone who is not in your room" via the computer screen. One might wonder what is understood as "private" since the site is accessible to anyone willing to pay the monthly fee. Rather than exploring our sexuality, we are being exploited by someone else's. Moreover, we should probably be fairly alarmed that our capacity for sexual imagination has become so poor that it needs assistance, proving unable to create on its own a satisfying self-expression of desire, a problem that one Marquis de Sade definitely did not have.

This rather bleak panorama of current sexual narration<sup>13</sup> should nonetheless be tempered by the mention of one particular cinematographic work which includes explicit sexual representation in its narration without falling into the category of sexploitation: Tinto Brass's 1980 film, Caligula.<sup>14</sup> The particulars of this film are significant for our purpose, for two different versions were released in 1980, and the one promoted through theaters was the "clean" one. The complete version (now widely available on DVD) includes additional scenes, all of them of an explicit sexual nature, directed by Giancarlo Lui and Bob Guccione, and deserves to be considered as the only well-known narration which used the sexual narrative motif without manipulating our built-in bourgeois morals. The fact that it tells a story of ancient Rome—that is, before the onset of judeo-christian morality—most likely contributes greatly to this necessary separation between sexual expression and its prohibition. The Romans did not need to hide sexual expression; and so, naturally, it was much more difficult to sell than it is now.

The prohibition of sexual expression in our morally bourgeois society, by favoring an exploitation mechanism which feeds on itself according to the logic of profit is slowly depriving us of any ability to construct an individual fantasy; in some ways, sexploitation is the corporate appropriation of our sex lives, reducing us to passive, sexually-mute consumers. Our sexual expression is kept in an infantile stage by our bourgeois morality so as to insure the prosperous future of the pornographic industry in all its shapes and forms; there is no doubt that we have to be children indeed to need so-called adult entertainment.

West Virginia University

Daniel F. Ferreras

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> See Ana Fausto-Sterling (13); the word "homosexuality" appears in a legal context in Germany, in order to change the anti-sodomy laws. It is generally accepted by historians as a symbolic date.

<sup>2</sup> Or so claims the Vatican; the fact is that many records of earlier canonizations are incomplete; therefore, it remains difficult to establish any real statistics. Nonetheless, John Paul's record of beatifications and canonizations is nothing short of breathtaking when compared to any of his predecessors.

<sup>3</sup> The canonization of Escriva de Balaguer, dictator Franco's spiritual guide, which raised more than one eyebrow among believers, is easily explained by the vast sums of money the Opus Dei invested in the Vatican during the same period. Franco's close ties to Nazi Germany and to Hitler in particular were conveniently overlooked in order to revamp the Vatican economy.

- <sup>4</sup> See in particular the novel *Histoire de Juliette*, in which a few crucifixions are the direct cause for some particularly refined sensual pleasures.
- <sup>5</sup> There is evidence that these practices are not the exclusivity of our late twentieth and early twenty first centuries, only our awareness of them has changed.
- <sup>6</sup> See Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle*, a fundamental work that presents the modern mechanism of consumer manipulation in modern economy. (Available in English online.)
- <sup>7</sup> The list of catholic martyrdoms is a long list of ultra-violent tortures and mutilations; Jesus's crucifixion sometimes seems pale in comparison.
- <sup>8</sup> Constance Penley, professor of film studies at UC Santa Barbara, in her own words in Real Sex: Pornucopia: Going Down in the Valley.
- <sup>9</sup> Although a fair amount of films were still shot in 35 millimeters, especially in Europe, video technology radically transformed distribution by allowing direct sales to private individuals and bypassing theatres. The arrival of DVD has further promoted distribution due to the derisory price of the object itself: a DVD represents a fraction of the cost of a VHS tape.
- <sup>10</sup> During my research. I have witnessed some extremely disturbing scenes from "legitimate" X-rated films—i.e. distributed by a major cable company and available in a subscription format—such as the lubrication of a Philippine young woman's genitalia with motor oil; globalization has allowed the porn industry to seek fresh meat elsewhere, participating in their own way to the organized exploitation of third world and Eastern European populations.
- <sup>11</sup> Rock music presents very clear illustrations of this phenomenon; an artist such as Madonna, for example, owes most of her fame to the open expression of her sexuality.
- <sup>12</sup> Sam Agboola, in his own words in *Pornucopia: Going Down in the Valley*.
- 13 Little children's naked bodies on the ceiling and a barely dressed young man nailed on a cross are indeed as current sexual narrative elements as they were a couple of thousand years ago; as far as the most extreme tales of sexual fantasy, those of Sade, our society does not appear to be ready just yet to tackle the text directly, preferring instead to exploit a cultural construction known as the Marquis de Sade in order to benefit from his ill reputation; Peter Brook's movie, based upon Peter Weiss's play, Marat/Sade and Kaufman's Quills are perfect illustrations of this cultural construction. Both are christian sadomasochistic iconography and Sade's greater novels are as current as web-sex; one could even argue that Sade's narrations are still ahead of us, since the coming of bourgeois morals during the Industrial Revolution marked a regression of our capacity to express sexual tension when compared to that of the French Revolution generation.
- <sup>14</sup> Setting aside any consideration of Bill Condon's very convincing film, *Kinsey*, which is above and foremost a biographical endeavor of an undeniably informative nature; that the movie only came out a few years ago is yet one more testimony to our sexual ignorance as was the original *Kinsey Report* in 1948.

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# Recreating Macau in the Image of Las Vegas: Will Cultural Globalization Come Home to Roost?

### Abstract

Casino gambling has become an important part of American popular culture. It has also become a cultural commodity that can be exported. This paper examines the frenzied development currently underway in the city of Macau, the former Portuguese colony that was returned to China in 1999. The small territory of Macau has long been known as a center for casino gambling in Asia. But since 2002, American investment has entered the scene in an effort to recreate the city in the image of Las Vegas. We consider what is happening in Macau as an example of cultural globalization, a concept that refers to cultural hegemony by powerful nations over weaker ones, leading to the homogenization of cultures in the likeness of the powerful nations. We discuss the history of Macau, the development it is now undergoing, the potential for Macau to surpass Las Vegas as the world's most profitable center for gambling revenue, and implications of Macau's growth for the concept of cultural globalization. We suggest that cultural globalization may be a two-way process and that the success of Macau may force Las Vegas to change in order to remain competitive for Asian gamblers.

A casino boom has echoed across America, from its epicenter in Las Vegas to the far-flung Indian reservations dotting the land. This historic expansion is both a reflection of the transformation of the casino business itself and the changes in social mores since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Casinos today are more than venues for games of chance; they are also resorts for spa treatment, high-end entertainment, and culinary delights. Concomitantly, public attitude has shifted, and visiting casinos is now a respectable pastime for all social classes, not just a leisure diversion for the rich or a last chance for those who want to be rich. As casino gambling has moved into the mainstream of American popular culture, it has also become a commodity that is exportable, just like so many other American cultural exports—Levi Jeans, Coca Colas, MTV, Starbucks, and the ubiquitous McDonald's.

Globally, three premier gambling capitals stand out across the continents: In addition to Las Vegas in North America, there are Monte Carlo in Europe and Macau in Asia. Of the three, Las Vegas tops the list in terms of total revenue, number of casinos, and volume of visitors. Macau, so far the least glamorous of the three, is attempting to remake itself into a tourist-friendly

destination by shedding its hard-core gambling reputation. In the process, it has become a target of powerful casino interests in the United Sates, notably Steve Wynn and Sheldon Adelson, who have designs in molding Macau in the image of Las Vegas (Kirkland). For academicians, it has become a case study in cultural globalization.

The concept of cultural globalization refers to cultural domination by powerful nations over weaker ones, leading to the homogenization of cultures in the likeness of the powerful nations. Specifically, it refers to the mass infusion of American popular culture into other countries since the 20th century, and the resultant development of American look-alikes (Crane). What's happening in Macau today is a glaring example of this type of hegemony.

### History of Macau and Its Gaming Industry

Macau, a small peninsula with a couple of equally small islands, is located on the southern coast of China. Originally known as Haojing (Oyster Mirror), it became a Portuguese colony for almost 400 years more or less by chance. (Historical information hereafter is mostly based on Fei's work and the Wikipedia Encyclopedia.)

In the mid 1500s, China reversed its closed-door policy and allowed foreign ships to anchor in some small seaports near Guangzhou. Foreigners were given permission to engage in trade onboard, rather than on shore. Portuguese ships began to anchor in Haojing. The cargoes of one of the ships were damped at sea. Its crew asked and was granted permission to land in order to dry the goods, which prompted other ships to seek the same privilege. After establishing a foothold, the Portuguese kept extending its stay and expanding its base.

Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the British defeated the Qing army in the Opium War (1840–42). Sensing an opportunity, the Portuguese in Haojing, which was also known as Macau by that time, declared independence. After ignoring the declaration for decades, the Qing Court finally ceded Macau to Portugal in signing the Treaty of Peking (1887–88). In 1999 Macau was returned to China, and it is now operated as a Special Administrative Region (SAR).

While Portuguese Macau was a beneficiary of the Opium War, it was also hurt by it. As a condition for peace, China gave Hong Kong to Britain and opened up other ports, such as Guangzhou and Shanghai, for foreign trade (Ebrey 239–240). Almost immediately, Macau lost its advantage as an entry port and plunged into financial chaos. What saved Macau was "weixing," a form of gambling that was gaining popularity in southern China since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The term "weixing" means betting on the names of the candidates who would pass the imperial civil service examinations. When the stake grew to millions of silver dollars annually, there were serious concerns that this form of wager would jeopardize the integrity of the exams. The government banned weixing. This led to an exodus of gambling houses to Macau where they were

welcomed for their tax revenue (Fei 259). It also set Macau on the path to become the foremost gambling venue in Asia.

The first casino franchise in Macau was granted to Tai Xing Company in 1937, but due to poor management, it did not prosper. In 1962 the government granted Stanley Ho's Sociedade de Turismo e Diversoes de Macau (STDM) a monopoly on the full range of gambling—casino, horse racing, and greyhound racing. Ho turned Macau into a mecca for high rollers and other serious players. Ho's exclusive license ended in 2001 and the SAR administration opened up the gaming market to international competition (Asiaweek).

Both Steve Wynn and Sheldon Adelson, moguls of Las Vegas, were successful bidders for two of the three new casino licenses. At the time of writing, even though only Adelson's Sands Macau has been opened, Macau is not the same place it once was. While many of the changes that are occurring in Macau today predated the American involvement, it is also obvious that they are prompted by the anticipation of what the American casinos will bring.

The remainder of this paper will examine the following: first, the growth that Macau is now undergoing; second, observations comparing Macau with Las Vegas; and third, some insights that the development of Macau provide for understanding the process of cultural globalization.

### A Sleepy Town's Dramatic Growth

The first and most obvious indication of growth in Macau is construction, both construction in progress and recently completed. Macau is located approximately 43 miles southwest of Hong Kong. The population of the territory is only 476,000 people. Most of these people live in the city of Macau on a narrow peninsula that is linked by road to the mainland of China. Two islands, Taipa and Coloane, are connected to the peninsula by bridges. The entire territory of Macau, including the peninsula, the two islands, and a reclaimed area, covers less than 17 square miles (Macau Government Tourism Office).

A \$16 billion-plus construction boom is underway in this small city and the two adjoining islands (*The Australian*). Roads are being expanded and upgraded throughout the city. A modern new bridge, the Amizade, was completed in early 2005, joining the old Governor Nobre de Cavalho Bridge in connecting Macau to Taipa. The Macau Tower and adjoining Convention Center was completed in late 2001. The Tower stands 732 feet, and has a strong resemblance to the 1,150 foot Stratosphere Tower in Las Vegas. An entertainment and theme park called Fisherman's Wharf is under construction near the Macau ferry terminal. It is a \$170 million project that features a 100 foot high volcano and facades of different periods of European architecture (e.g., Roman Coliseum, the leaning Tower of Pisa, traditional Portuguese restaurants, etc.). The downtown and harbor areas are dominated by new office buildings, upscale boutiques, hotels, and casinos, some recently completed and others under construction. Much more construction is in the planning stages, including

large projects on the island of Taipa and in the reclaimed area between Taipa and Coloane islands called the Cotai Strip.

Jobs are plentiful in Macau today. Labor is being imported to work on all the construction. Tourism is at an all-time high. In 2004, the number of visitors to Macau totaled 16 million. In the first seven months of 2005, a record 10.5 million visitors arrived, up 14.4 percent from the same period last year (*Reuters*). Predictions are that the visitor total may well hit 20 million for 2005 (*Asia Times Online*).

### The Emergence of a New Gambling Mecca

The competition sparked by the end of the monopoly in gambling has dramatically changed the picture in Macau. The older casinos owned by Stanley Ho were relatively small, smoky, unimpressive facilities that served the serious, mostly male card-playing gamblers who came across the border from mainland China, or by ferry from Hong Kong. Generally, patrons came for the day, and few stayed for any length of time at the hotels.

Currently, Stanley Ho still owns 15 of Macau's 17 operating casinos. These include his flagship hotel casino, the Lisboa, and the recently built Casino New Century-Greek Mythology on Tapia. Both are much more impressive than the smaller, older Ho casinos.

The first Las Vegas style casino, the \$320 million Sands Macau, opened on May 18, 2004. It looks similar, inside and out, to an upscale Las Vegas Strip casino but is very different from the older Macau casinos. It is located near the ferry to take advantage of day visitors. The 163,000 square foot casino features 848 slots and 360 table games. The facility also includes two restaurants and a small, but elegant, 51-suite hotel for high-roller clients. The Sands Macau has turned out to be a spectacular success. Fifteen thousand people gathered to enter the casino as the doors opened for the first time (*Time Asia*). One year from opening, on June 13, 2005, the Las Vegas Sands Corporation announced that the casino had already paid for itself, and all of its outstanding debt had been retired. The Sands Macau is on track to generate over \$320 million in pretax cash flow in the year ahead, more than the total income from the 4,000 hotel rooms and the restaurants, showrooms, shops, gaming tables, and slots at the company's highly profitable Las Vegas flagship, the Venetian (Kirkland).

The success of the Sands Macau has spurred other investors. The Wynn Group is well along on construction of a first phase of the Wynn Macau Casino Hotel. It is a smaller replica of their recently opened \$3 billion complex in Las Vegas. The Wynn Macau is to open in August 2006, with 200 tables, 380 slots, a five-star 600-room hotel, a ballroom, six restaurants, and a man-made lake. The second phase has now been pushed ahead. It will add another 150 tables, 500 more slots, two more restaurants, convention space, and an entertainment facility. The whole project is now valued at \$1 billion (*The Australian*). The



Photo 1: Top: The Lisboa, Stanley Ho's flagship casino hotel. Bottom: The Wynn Macau under construction. Due for completion in summer 2006.

Wynn Group hopes to change the character of Macau gaming by moving away from day gamblers and attracting people who seek a longer stay, entertainment, an elegant hotel, and good restaurants. In other words, Wynn hopes to turn Macau in the direction he took Las Vegas over the past two decades. Other American gaming corporations also share this vision for Macau.

More importantly for Macau, the Ho family now agrees with the vision of the Americans. In spite of the family's extensive personal connections, political clout, gaming interests, and long history in the former colony, the Hos were swayed by the Americans, who are greenhorns on their home turf. Many more and bigger projects are in various stages of development. These include the "City of Dreams," a large multi-hotel project by members of the Ho family, a second much larger hotel-casino by the Wynn Group, a giant \$2.5 billion Venetian Macau project that also includes several hotels, and a \$1 billion MGM Grand Macau that is currently under construction. It is obvious that both the new casinos and the tourist attractions outside of the casinos, such as the Volcano, the Roman Coliseum, and the leaning Tower of Pisa, mirror the flamboyance of Las Vegas. But in spite of the exterior resemblances, there are many differences between Macau and Las Vegas.

### Comparisons with Las Vegas

### 1. Economy:

The changed economy of Las Vegas has been widely discussed. While it is still dependent on the tourist industry anchored by the Strip hotels, the economy has become more diversified as the metropolitan area has grown. The economics of the hotel-casinos have also changed. They have become less dependent on the gambling take for their profits. Currently, more than half of the income of the gaming corporations comes from money spent on meals, entertainment, and the hotels.

Macau is more like the Las Vegas of the past. Its economy is almost completely based on gaming revenue. A Reuters report notes that in the first seven months of 2005, income from direct gaming taxes accounted for 76 percent of the government's total revenues. And until the new hotel casinos come on line, the income they produce is almost completely from the tables. The new hotel casinos, with their larger and more expensive hotel rooms, more and better restaurants, and more forms of entertainment, may change this in the future. But for now, the gaming tables are the profit centers in Macau.

### 2. The Casinos:

Casino floors in Las Vegas might be described as a sea of video/slot machines that surround islands of table games. Fifty-four percent of all gaming revenues from Las Vegas Strip casinos come from slot machines (Nevada State Gaming Control Board). Games played at the tables include blackjack, craps, roulette, baccarat, Pai Gow, and a variety of others. Other islands amidst the





Photo 2: Top: The Sands Macau casino opened in 2004. Bottom: The Fisherman's Wharf entertainment complex under construction.

slots include bars that serve alcoholic drinks to patrons who watch sports on screens and play video poker. Additional sections of the floor are set aside for sports betting, poker, and keno. Many Las Vegas casinos also have VIP areas roped off for higher stakes gambling. These areas are often semi-formal (dealers wear tuxedos) venues set up with a few baccarat tables. However, it is generally believed that the real high stakes gambling takes place in rooms that are more private and out of view of the public.

The Macau casino floors are very different. Asian gamblers are primarily card players. The game of choice in Macau is baccarat. While blackjack and other games are also found, baccarat is clearly the most popular. The floor is a sea of card tables, with small spaces devoted to video/slot machines (see Table 1). The slots are often found on the periphery of the floor, against the walls and in hallways. While the smallest casinos in Las Vegas offer numerous slots but few table games, the smallest casinos in Macau feature table games and few if any slots. In a recent visit to Macau, the authors found the tables crammed with customers, but the slots were lightly utilized.

Like the Sands Macau, the new American-sponsored casinos will offer many more slot machines than are found in the traditional Macau casinos. The Wynn Macau will offer 850 machines on its completion. Its next door neighbor, the MGM Grand Macau that broke ground in June 2005, will provide over 2,000 slots when its final phase is completed. The Americans are betting that they can change the interests and habits of the Asian gamblers, and perhaps attract more female gamblers that will enjoy the slots.

The main floor of the typical Macau casino is ringed by private salons or VIP rooms for high rollers. The Sands Macau has adopted the Macau model in this regard and offers eighteen such rooms that are marketed to the gamblers through its invitation-only Paiza Club.

The Macau gamblers are intense and their play is highly stylized and filled with ritual behaviors. In the most popular games, baccarat and blackjack, two cards are dealt to the player face down. The player neatly stacks the two cards and then lifts the front edge with one hand and bends the cards back to expose the denomination of the bottom card. The second card is behind and not yet visible. The Macau gambler will then squeeze the cards together with his fingers until the second card very slowly slips out and is finally revealed. The tension that builds during this ritual adds drama and excitement to the play. It also results in bent cards that cannot be reused. Another ritual is hurling the cards on the table with gusto. This may occur when the squeezing ritual reveals a sure winner such as a "blackjack" or a "natural" hand (the cards add up to an 8 or 9) in baccarat, or after a hand is finished with a big win or loss. One particular protocol that would shock newcomers to a Macau casino is that anyone can walk up behind a blackjack player, put down double the amount of the bet that the player has on the table, and take over his/her hand as a senior partner. The original player will still hold the cards, but the uninvited partner now controls the hand and calls hit or stay. Consents are not required and the takeover is done

Table 1. Comparing the numbers of slot machines vs. table games in various casinos located in Las Vegas and Macau

Las Vegas

Casino:	Number of Slot Machines:	Number of Table Games:
Caesars Palace	1900	125
Bally's	2100	105
Circus Circus	2250	85
MGM Grand	2500	164
Wynn Las Vegas	1925	200
Terrible's	862	12
Las Vegas Club	810	21

### Macau

Casino:	Number of Slot Machines:	Number of Table Games:	
Lisboa	107	146	
Galaxy Waldo	100	63	
New Century	100	500	
Fortuna	0	35	
MJC	0	13	
Sands Macau*	848	360	
		*American owned casino	

(Source: Casino City Times)

without uttering a word. It's all understood once someone reaches over and plunks down twice the amount of the bet. These practices that are deemed outrageous in Las Vegas are seen as normal and appropriate in Macau, and identify one as a seriously cool gambler. To keep their sharpness and focus on the game, the gamblers drink tea at the tables instead of alcoholic beverages.

Another factor distinguishing the Macau casinos is the heavy smoke filling the room. The gamblers tend to chain smoke as they play. There are no smoke-free sections. In fact, this trait distinguishes the new American-owned Sands Macau from other casinos in Macau. In the Sands Macau, a good-sized section of the casino is designated for non-smokers, something not seen in other clubs. It should be noted that there is less activity in this section of the Sands Macau than in the larger section that allows smoking.

The older Macau casinos have a strong masculine character and most of the gamblers are male. A sideshow in some of the casinos in Macau is the parade of young prostitutes. While prostitution may be readily available in Las Vegas, there is a substantial and continual effort to limit its visibility. This is not the case in Macau casinos. The circular hallway that winds through the restaurant and shop complex of the Lisboa is notable for the continuous parade of pairs and trios of young, well-dressed Asian women searching for eye contact with interested males. The lack of these women in the Sands Macau distinguishes it from the other casinos, and identifies it with the owners' Las Vegas roots.

Streetwalkers are also common in areas near the casinos, including a large group of Russian women. The Russians are called "ghost women" by the locals in reference to their white skin. They are found on street corners, and at a location on a walking street behind the downtown Holiday Inn, not far from a number of casinos. Here a large group of them is known to be available every afternoon and evening as they sit around tables in front of a restaurant socializing and sipping sodas—and propositioning passersby. They seem to have no trouble from police.

### **Rethinking Cultural Globalization**

Cultural globalization is often thought of as a one-way flow, a dominant society infusing its cultural contents into a weaker one. While we can see evidence of that in Macau as it is being recreated into Las Vegas East, something else is also happening that may make it necessary for the flow to be two-way in order for Las Vegas to maintain its premier gaming status.

Macau, the stepchild of Las Vegas, has become a revenue-generating powerhouse. Analysts from the brokerage house CLSA Asia-Pacific Markets predict Macau's casinos could bring in \$6.3 billion in 2005, nearly a 20 percent increase from the \$5.33 billion in 2004 (*New York Times*). That 2004 figure was equal to the total revenue brought in by all casinos on the Las Vegas Strip that year, and not far from the \$6.25 billion revenue for 2004 for the whole of Las Vegas that includes The Strip, Downtown, and North Las Vegas (Nevada State Gaming Control Board).

The fact that current gaming revenue is already approaching that which is produced in Las Vegas is especially impressive given the relatively few casinos (17 in Macau vs. 83 in Las Vegas) and gaming tables currently in Macau (Casino City Times). The revenue per table in Macau is about \$18,000, compared to about \$2,500 in Las Vegas, according to Aaron Fischer, an analyst at CLSA Asia-Pacific Markets (New York Times). With a dramatic increase in the number of casinos and tables coming on-line in the near future, the gaming market could grow from \$9 billion to \$12 billion in the next five years (Las Vegas Sun).

The potential of Macau to surpass Las Vegas as the "Gambling Mecca of the World" does not seem unrealistic. Other than Australia and New Zealand, it is the only place in Asia with legalized full-fledged gambling, and it sits within a five-hour flight of 3 billion people—nearly half of the world's population. Las Vegas, by contrast, is the same distance from only 450 million people (U.S. News and World Report).

More importantly, Macau is the only place in China where gambling is legal, and the Chinese love to gamble. Traditionally, gambling is a major element of Chinese popular culture, and the casino scene available in Macau seems to be an especially enticing form of entertainment, since there are no other legal alternatives. As China continues to develop, and more of its 1.3 billion people accumulate wealth, Macau will be an attractive and accessible place to spend it. Sheldon Adelson, head of the Sands Corporation, is quoted in a recent issue of *Fortune* as predicting that Macau's Cotai Strip will become Asia's—and thus the world's—biggest gambling and entertainment mecca in five years (Kirkland).

The recreation of Macau in the image of Las Vegas, along with its easy accessibility for Asian gamblers, may also have consequences for the economy of Las Vegas. Asian tourist gamblers have become an important source of income for present-day Las Vegas. To remain competitive in retaining its current flow of Asian gamblers, and to tap the vast new source of gaming revenue among the growing number of Chinese with money to spend, may require changes in the way Las Vegas casinos do things. Some changes are already visible, including the greater availability of Asian card games like Pai Gow, the expanding number of Asian restaurants, dressing up the town with seasonal ornaments for the Lunar New Year celebration, and staging concerts with pop stars from Asia. However, those changes are just window dressing that delights the vacationers and casual gamblers. To attract more serious players from Asia, Las Vegas may have to take more drastic measures and adopt some of the casino rituals and practices now found in Macau: more room for baccarat tables and greater tolerance for card-bending, card-throwing behaviors. It may also have to change the rules of playing blackjack to allow the hostile takeover, just like in Macau. The bottom line for cultural globalization is that market forces ultimately determine the direction and content of the flow between cultures.



Photo 3: Banners celebrating Chinese New Year at The Venetian in Las Vegas.

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## Gendered Ambivalence: Representations of *Kathoey* in Thailand

Thailand's *kathoey* (ladyboys) have been subject to scholarly scrutiny over the last fifteen years (Jackson 1995, 1998, 2004; Rattachumpoth 1999; Matzner 2002; Winter 2002a, 2002b, 2003a 2000b, 2003c; 2005; Van Esterick 2000; Totman 2003) partly due to the growth of Queer Studies in the West, as well as the spread of AIDS in Asia. While such theoretical attention has provided a sensitive insight into the world of *kathoey*, greater analyses are needed into the social representations of *kathoey*, and how kathoey are constructed as "Other."

This paper is concerned with representations of *kathoey* in Thai society and media, and how they are posited on ambivalence. I am influenced by Jackson's notion of "intersubjective ambiguity," which prioritises the social aspect of human relationships and how they are constituted. According to Jackson (1998:8), "intersubjectivity is a site of constructive, destructive, and reconstructive interaction." In other words, human constructions of others move between these two poles, reflecting the "instability of human consciousness" (1998:9–10). For example, the 1970s cult figure "Dirty Harry" embodied he American tropes of both modern day hero and avenger. Dirty Harry's tall, laconic character moves between the social margins—between illicit and socially sanctioned behaviours, emulating the anti-heroes of the "wild west." The focal point of Dirty Harry's persona, his 44 Magnum pistol, highlights his indeterminacy.

On this theme, Straayer (1996) et al. have indicated that western representations of gender are being increasingly challenged via the popular cultural icon of the "she-male." For Straayer, the she-male is a site for contesting notions of gender. The she-male represents a physical arena where gendered fixedness is violated, smashed, diminished, and transcended. I would argue that in Thai society, *kathoey* embody a similar role. Since *kathoey* have co-existed with heterosexual Thais for centuries, an historic overview of *kathoey* is necessary in order to understand modern representations of them.

### Kathoey: Social, Historic, and Religious Dimensions

From a western viewpoint the term *kathoey* is "somewhat nebulous" and embraces various kinds of transgendered and homosexual males.<sup>2</sup> Although historically the term denoted "hermaphrodite" (Jackson 1998, Taywaditep et al, 1997), modern renditions of *kathoey* include *pumia/pumae* (male-female), *pet tee sam* (third sex), *kathoey tee sai suer pha phuying* (kathoey dressing as a woman), *ork-sao* (outwardly a woman) and *sao-dao-thiam* (artificial woman) (Winter 2002a). Winter (2002a) notes that "all of these terms make reference either to a clear female gender identity, or to one that is decidedly non-male."

Moreover, the plethora of names associated with *kathoey* and *kathoeyness* in popular Thai culture reflects an "occupation of a range of gender-spaces, extending from non-male through a blend of male and female, to a subset of female or even a third sex/gender" (Winter 2003), all of which are not found in western vocabularies. This alone makes an exploration of *kathoey* both a difficult and insightful venture.

Kathoey can be found in many areas of Thai society, including professional workers, entertainers, models, hairdressers, shop vendors, and sex workers (Winter 2003b). Reports differ to the number of kathoey living in Thailand. Estimates range from ten thousand (Ehrlich 1996), to three hundred thousand (Winter 2002). Even if we take the lesser figure to be an accurate estimate, it represents a higher ratio of transgendered people living in Thailand than in many parts of the world (Kesteren et al 1996; Francoeur 1997).

In Bangkok, *kathoey* tend to habituate marginalised zones where Thai values are openly challenged. A major reason for this is the allure of money which the sex and cabaret industry provides. Winter (2002b) points out that *kathoey* are more likely to be drawn to "cabarets and bars for work" in order to pay for their sex reassignment surgery. Such work may also include tips from patrons and money for photographs. Considering that "sex reassignment surgery can cost from US\$950," bar and cabaret work can make "surgery possible" (Winter 2002b). Moreover, cabarets and bars provide meeting places for *kathoey* to meet foreign male partners, with the likelihood of being taken overseas, or even married as a "legal" female (Winter 2002b).

Places such as Silom by night and Rachada are a nexus for cabaret shows, restaurants, bars, and "red light" entertainment. These liminal arenas are carnivalesque, enticing guests and observers to an array of sensual Thai pleasures. Interestingly, *kathoey* have been able to create their own spatial niches where they can freely engage in their *kathoeyness*. Furthermore, *kathoey* spaces offer a means for *kathoey* to reaffirm their gender while "attracting audience admiration" as an ideal type of Thai beauty (Winter 2002b).

The Thai worldview of *kathoey* is verified in mythology and Theravadan Buddhism. An examination of a *Yan* (northern Thai) creation myth dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century illustrates the contemporary ambivalence towards *kathoey*. The myth narrates how a female called Nang Itthang Gaiya Sangkasi emerged from the earth element. She then created the animals of the earth. A male called Pu Sangaiya Sangkasi was created from the fire element. Pu Sangaiya Sangkasi was allowed to marry Nang Itthang Gaiya Sangkasi if he could answer why the animals were continually reborn and die, and how this could be prevented. Having answered her question, the two were married. Afterwards, Pu Sangaiya Sangkasi suggested that three sexes should be created: male, female and hermaphrodite.

Nang Itthang Gaiya Sangkasi shaped the first human beings and gave them life. The three people had three children. Itthi (the woman) loved Pullinga (the man) more than Napumsaka (the hermaphrodite). Napumsaka became jealous of their relationship and killed Pullinga. Itthi buried Pullinga's body. Soon afterward, Napumsaka died. Itthi also buried his body. While Itthi made offerings of rice to her dead husband she avoided Napumsaka's grave. Seeing this, the three children asked her why she brought food to the first father and not to the second father. She replied that she loved the first father, but did not love the second father. After Itthi died, the three children collected the bodies of the three parents and buried them, where they daily offered them food.

In the second generation of humans (having the same names as their parents), Itthi dies and is buried by her husband Pullinga, who plants a tree over her grave and makes daily offerings. After the hermaphrodite dies Pullinga buries the body but ignores it thereafter. When Pullinga's children enquire why he only made offerings to the mother's grave, he replies that he loved only the mother and not the hermaphrodite (202–8212).<sup>5</sup>

Three interesting points arise in this myth. First, the hermaphrodite commits the first murder. Second, "negative feelings" towards the hermaphrodite, leading to its marginalisation, is expressed in both generations of humans. (Matzner 2002) Third, each generation of children make a symbolic rapprochement with the deceased hermaphrodite after its initial banishment. In each generation the hermaphrodite is re-included in the society of humans where it "rightfully" belongs in order to accord with the primordial design of a three-gendered universe.

On this theme, some Buddhist writings refer to four genders (male, female, hermaphrodite, and sexually deficient) (Winter 2003b). From a Thai Buddhist perspective, *kathoey* are the product of sexual misdemeanours committed in previous incarnations, and are therefore to be treated with compassion (Winter 2002b). Winter (2002b) and Jackson (1998) note, "That while being a *kathoey* is not ideal, her condition is understandable." The implication is that all humans have been *kathoey* in a previous life (Winter 2002b, Winter 2005). As Bunni explains:

Because the very people who laugh at *kathoey* were themselves once *kathoey*. Absolutely everyone without exception has been a *kathoey* because we have been through innumerable cycles of birth and death, and we don't know how many times we have been *kathoey* in past lives or how many times we may be *kathoey* in the future (Bunmi Methangkun, reported in Jackson 1998).

Tolerance of *kathoey* even extends to sexual liaisons with them. Gearing (2001) points out that, "For many heterosexual Thais, sex with a kathoey, while not openly approved, carries little of the stigma of going with a female prostitute." One reason for this could be that intercourse with prostitutes being "natural women" compromises the heterosexual role of wives. However, as I shall discuss later, *kathoey* are being increasingly represented as paragons of Thai female beauty.

Interestingly, altering one's sex does not incur negative karma but fighting against one's condition may produce negative karma (Jackson 1998). Interviews conducted with *kathoey* found that 47 percent of *kathoeys* explained their transgender in terms of karma (Winter 2002b).

Buddhist acceptance of *kathoey* can be seen in Buddhist monks blessing marriages between men and kathoey, and in the staging of annual beauty contests at Buddhist temples to raise money for temple works (Winter 2005, Winter 2003b). Such events reflect traditional *kathoey* roles as flower arrangers and food preparers during village festivities (Winter 2002b).

Buddhism's teaching on impermanence is important here. Buddhist doctrine teaches that all things are mutable, including gender. Even as all living beings take on future rebirths, the act of being reborn in the present life is also possible (Winter 2002b), especially where the technology makes it feasible. Concomitant with the impermanence of life is the Buddhist concept of *anatta* (no-self). In short, *anatta* professes that each of us is the sum of many lives, and are undergoing transformation. Acceptance of one's condition is a pre-requisite for being at ease with oneself.

#### Thai media representations of kathoey

Thai media representations of *kathoey* offer a range of stereotypical images which reaffirm *kathoey* ambivalence. In order to understand media representations of *kathoey*, an overview of popular Thai attitudes towards *kathoey* is required. My research uncovered mainly negative views of *kathoey*. The Thais I interviewed told me that most Thai people generally distrust *kathoey*. Distrust of *kathoey* can be attributed to perceptions of their apparent dishonesty and exhibitionist behaviour which contradicts Thai notions of modesty and prudence. For example, in Thai society, the ideal type of woman is referred to as *kunla satri*, or a woman who embodies virtuous qualities. One such quality is modesty in behaviour so as not to draw attention to oneself. Thai convention emphasises that women should behave politely at all times so as to uphold their families "good" reputation. Maintenance of one's virginity until marriage is also an indicator of a Thai woman's virtuousness.

This raises the problem of *kathoey* behaviour in general. Many *kathoey* tend to be extroverted and more direct in their dealings with others than Thai women. One reason for this may be due to *kathoey* retaining male assertive traits (Winter 2002b). Another reason can be attributed to discrimination practices against *kathoey* which force many of them toward dominant behaviours. While Thai society generally tolerates *kathoey*, tolerance often ceases at giving them jobs (Winter 2002b). Job discrimination even affects *kathoey* university graduates (Winter & Udomsak 2002c).

Recent events have also led to further discrimination practices. The murder of a woman by a *kathoey* university student in Chang Mai in 1996 sparked a tirade of negative press against *kathoey* which led to them being banned from one of the Rajhabat Universities in Thailand (Etigazette.com 2005). Matzner asserts that the "negative stereotypical (media) images of

kathoey were used in stories about this case, and transgendered men as a group were reported by the media to be violent and unstable." Consequently, the Rajhabat Institute, which represents teachers colleges, banned homosexuals and *kathoey* "from being employed as teachers." Storer points out that the murder case highlighted the Thai media penchant for positioning homosexuals, including *kathoey*, in negative terms based on Thai social stereotypes. Negative qualities associated with *kathoey* and homosexuals include *withathaan* (perverted), *wipparit* (perverted) and *pit pairt* (abnormal, wrong sex). In the Thai daily newspaper *The Nation* (January 7, 2002), a *kathoey* called Pok added that in Thai popular culture *kathoey* are viewed as social deviants.

This fixation in positioning *kathoey* and homosexuals as the "deviant 'Other'" were corroborated in *The Nation* (January 25, 1997, p. 1) in an article called "Psychologists on Fence Over Gay Ban." The article reported how psychologists "neither condemned nor supported educational institutions banning homosexuals" and *kathoey*. Thongchai Thawichachat, deputy director general of the Mental Health Department, and other psychologists gave a press conference, in which Thongchai said homosexuals should be viewed with "sympathy and understanding." Thongchai's comments seemingly reflect Thai historic and religious constructions of *kathoey* and homosexuals as victims needing societal pity. In an interview for *The Nation*, a *kathoey*, Pok, claimed that medical and psychological studies conducted by Thai researchers are discriminatory. According to Pok, "In-department research, even by professors, on types of 'kathoey,' the reasons for being 'kathoey,' to effects on health such as AIDS, reflect discrimination, so that one must be 'normal', as opposed to 'kathoey', which is 'abnormal."

The portrayal of kathoey as "deviant Other" has been informed by Thai media in relation to commodification. In short, kathoey are increasingly becoming a "selling point for commercialism." According to Ayuttaya, kathoev have become a central topic for television and print medias. 18 While there has been more potential for kathoey to be included by Thai media, the level of inclusiveness is based mainly on the "marketability" of kathoey. 19 The apex of commercialism has been characterised by the Miss Tiffany kathoey beauty pageant which has received much national and international media attention. Beginning in 1997, the Miss Tiffany's pageant has been crucial in defining Thai feminine beauty. The Miss Tiffany pageant, which occurs in March in Pattava at the same time as the Miss Thailand competition, has rivaled the latter in popularity and prestige.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the winner of the Miss Tiffany pageant is the "only Thai representative to the Miss International Queen Pageant."21 Competition between the two pageants received coverage from CNN and Reuters "with headlines such as: 'Tiffany boys out to prove gender gap narrowing,' 'Thailand's newest beauty queen is no lady,' and 'Battle of Queens on national TV."22 Moreover, in 2001 the Las Vegas Review nominated the Tiffany show as "the best cabaret show in Thailand."23 In her article, "Transvestites Glitter at Thailand Pageant," Alisa Tang, an Associated Press reporter, notes that the 2005 Miss Tiffany pageant was "broadcast live on national television" with the winner, Tiptantree Rujiranon, calling for the same social rights for *kathoey* "as people of any other gender."

Kathoey shows, such as the Miss Tiffany pageant, have become an accepted part of Thai popular culture. This may be partly explained by the high value which Thai popular culture places on physical beauty. According to Van Esterik (2000:4), Thai society encourages "an essentialism of appearances or surfaces," which has been strategically deployed by kathoey. The Buddhist rationale of physical beauty as reflecting "merit store" and "moral purity" (Van Esterick p. 84, cited in Jackson 2004) is significant as individuals can accrue social capital, thereby improving their social legitimacy.

Interestingly, kathoey are increasingly becoming a dilemma for Thai women since kathoey are redefining the ideal of Thai feminine beauty. Let me further discuss this point. My Thai female informants acknowledged that kathoey were generally more beautiful than women. Interestingly, while Thai women spoke of kathoey as representing an ideal type of Thai "feminine" beauty as depicted in the Miss Tiffany pageant, kathoey are still perceived as being "male." As one informant told me, kathoey are men who behave like women. To highlight this ambivalence, Thais tend to notice more the "tell-tale" signifiers of kathoeyness than foreigners. These include the person's height (kathoey are generally taller than women and most men), size of their hands and feet, shoulder width, and type of clothing. In keeping with their "exhibitionist" label, kathoey are perceived as wearing shorter dresses than women, and portraying exaggerated feminine gestures.

However, Aree Chaisatien from *The Nation* (January 17, 2002) argues that *kathoey* sometimes can elude their gender before fellow Thais. Tang notes that "As contestants glided across the stage in glittering ball gowns Saturday night, one might never have guessed they were all born boys. Only when they open their mouths do their vocal cords reveal the truth." In the same article, Wararat Saengchai, a twenty one year old *kathoey* entrant in the 2005 Miss Tiffany pageant, said: "Most people can't tell because I'm very petite, but when I talk, they know." Commenting on Saengchai, Tang states that "If she keeps quiet, her delicate features could fool anyone."

Given the moral power of aesthetics for Thais, it could be suggested that *kathoey* monopolisation of the "beauty stakes" has given them a new-found special status for influencing beauty trends. Unsurprisingly, *kathoey* can be found among the ranks of the most beautiful Thai models. However, unlike Thai women who are "affected by the judgment of their appearance," (Van Esterick p.129, cited in Jackson 2004), *kathoey* are seemingly free to "pursue beauty" without succumbing to moral imposition.

The theme of the ideal Thai feminine type was challenged by famous kathoey Muay Thai, boxer turned film star, in the 2003 box office smash hit movie Beautiful Boxer. The movie is based on Parinya Charoenphol's (affectionately referred to as Nong Toom) personal saga of a poor village boy

who at an early age finds himself drawn to women more than men. When his parents are unable to work, Nong Toom becomes a Muay Thai boxer, Moreover, Thai boxing becomes a way for Nong Toom to raise money for his sex change surgery (Nong Toom underwent full sex reassignment surgery in 1999).<sup>28</sup> The movie highlights various levels of Thai cultural ambivalence: Firstly, kathoey belief that they are women who are trapped in the bodies of men, which is used in the movie's preview billing "who fights like a man so he can become a woman." Underscoring kathoey belief, when asked by National Geographic which gender she would choose in her next incarnation, Nong Toom said that she would "choose to be born a man (in her next incarnation). But this time, a real man, with a man's heart to match the man's body."<sup>29</sup> Secondly, the movie discloses Thai ambivalence of kathoey as depicted in Non Toom's penchant for wearing lipstick during her fighting bouts, and her refusal to strip before a reporters' pre-fight gathering in 1998.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Nong Toom's character threatens Thai concepts of masculinity to the point that she is suspected by a daunted Thai boxing fraternity as being a product of "a well-crafted promotional conspiracy."31

While the Beautiful Boxer contests popular Thai misconceptions of kathoey. That media has tended to represent kathoey according to social stereotypes. They are often depicted as silly, comical, histrionic, childish, weak, and insignificant. Asiaweek magazine reported that some psychiatrists thought that images of kathoey on T.V. could "encourage youngsters to turn gay." 32 According to Jittima Phanutecha of the Women's Health Advocacy Foundation, gays, lesbians, and transgenders "in the Thai media remained stereotyped as being abnormal and unnatural."<sup>33</sup> Her article "The Media's Portrayals of Sexual Diversity" further states that discrimination is also apparent in the use of language. "While heterosexual couples are khoo rak (love couple), same-gender couples in the same situation are invariably called khoo kha (sex partners)."34 She also found that visual portravals of non-heterosexuals often showed them wearing "skimpy costumes or making hypersexual displays of affection." 35 Similarly, Viroi Tangyanich, a well-known media personality and "president of the Rainbow Sky Association of Thailand," commented on the following about kathoey and the Thai media: "Our newspapers make money out of our sex drives, and our television allows more kathoev appearances than anywhere. There have been generations of gay and kathoey personalities on television, but we have all been assigned to the roles of clowns or low-life kathoeys."36 For instance, commercials, such as one by the Dtac mobile company, depict a kathoev as a Marilyn Monroe look alike, flaunting her legs. Similarly, in the Thai comedy movie called Yam Yasoton, a kathoey acts as sidekick to a spiteful female protagonist. Throughout the movie the kathoey overacts her way wiggling her hips and portraying "camp" gestures. The movie's conclusion depicts the kathoey in bed between two endearing male lovers. While the scene is comical, it plays up to popular Thai cultural stereotypes of kathoey sexual deviancy.

The popular Thai movie Satree Lex (Iron Ladies) highlights gendered ambivalence of kathoey. Youngyooth Thongkonthun's comedy is based on a true story of the 1996 Thai volleyball team which was comprised of kathoey, gays and one "straight" player. Asiaweek magazine had compared the movie to a Thai version of The Full Monty.<sup>37</sup> Made from a paltry budget of \$360,000, Satree Lex became the highest grossing Thai movie ever.<sup>38</sup> While the movie touches on issues of discrimination and empowerment, it is mainly fuelled by kathoey stereotypes. The "camp spectacle" of the movie undermines any attempt towards informing the audience on the marginalisation of kathoey and gays.

The theme of marginalization and sexual ambivalence is poignantly evinced by the Thai military which had attempted to overhaul its policy on kathoey. Based on "an existing conscription law" of 1954, the Thai military failed to provide a suitable niche for kathoey and gays, whose profiles were marked as suffering from a "mental disorder." 39 Kathoey celebrity Nong Toom told a Thai television station, "The words 'mental disorder' marked on the certificate seriously affects our lives." Gay rights activist Natee Theerarojnaphongm, who crusaded to exclude the words "mental disorder' from the conscript exemption," added that employers would be reluctant to "hire anyone with a record of mental disorder. 41 In typical Thai compromise, the military created two categories for disqualifying kathoey: The first being those persons who had an "unacceptable chest measurement." The more ideal alternative was where a "mismatch between anatomy and birth gender" was found.<sup>43</sup> The publicised case of twenty-one year old Thanakorn Chaipura is a case in point. Thanakorn had filed an appeal to be exempted from military service on the grounds that he was a woman trapped in a man's body. 44 The official report concluded that Thanaporn had physical attributes of male and female. 45 Dr. Sanit Chakrit, Director of the Phrae Provincial Hospital "recommended Thanakorn's discharge for medical reasons," saving that he was unfit to serve in the military.<sup>46</sup>

The theme of gendered ambivalence is also portrayed in the movie "The Last Song" (1986) which was the first Thai movie to discuss transgenderedness. The leading character is played by Somying Daorai, a real life *kathoey* performer from Pattaya. The story line is based on the dramatic plot of opportunistic love between Somying and her lover, Boonterm. When the lover leaves Somying for a "real" woman, Somying shoots herself on stage Kaewprasert (2005). Kaewprasert states that the movie is important as it highlights the fluid nature of "gender identities" in the Thai cabaret lifeworld. For Kaewpasert (2005:6), Somying's death intimates *kathoey* emotional weakness and "homosexual inferiority complex" in the face of Thai heterosexuality. The movie attempts to privilege love over social standing, the latter, being embedded in Thai society, prevails (Kaewprasert 2005).

Tortured Love, the movie sequel to The Last Song, deals with Somying's twin brother Somnuk. Having learnt of Somying's death, Somnuk conspires to avenge his sibling. Somying's friends forbid Somnuk from taking

revenge by reminding him of karmic law. As one friend mentions "we were born with bad karma from the last life, do not make more bad karma in this one" (Kaewprasert 2005:7). As discussed earlier, Thai Buddhism holds that being born a kathoev is a consequence of accumulating bad karma from previous lives. Nevertheless, kathoey are to be treated with compassion since their present condition is "karmically natural" (Kaewprasert 2005) and allows them to gain spiritual merit. The twist in the movie comes via Boonterm being dissatisfied with his wife while desiring Somnuk. By the end of the movie, Boonterm becomes a monk, having escaped Somnuk's revenge. The movie interplays the themes of "heterosexuality/homosexuality/. celibacy/libidinous. priesthood/kathoev" (Kaewprasert 2005:8). Boonterm's "priesthood at the end of the film can be read as a leap into another world, outside the queer narratives and the regime of confusion" (Kaewprasert 2005:8). Here, becoming a monk is an acceptable social outcome rather than entering into the liminal world of kathoev.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

While many *kathoey* have been able to enter into mainstream Thai society, they are often victimised by discrimination. The recent AIDS phenomenon which affected Thailand in the 1980s and 1990s further marginalised *kathoey* and gays, who were blamed for the epidemic. Moreover, some Thai revisionists have considered *kathoey* as besmirching the image of Thailand, and have called for their extrication from Thai popular culture. Such revisionism goes against the grain of the complex gender culture in Thailand which has privileged gender complimentarity (Jackson 2004). This complimentarity has been informed by intersecting mythological and religious influences. In this scheme, *kathoey* represent the Thai penchant for collapsing gender distinctions and in valuing aesthetic surfaces which has elevated *kathoey* as icons of Thai femininity. As embodiments of parody and gendered eclecticism, *kathoey* bodies are sites for Thai cultural polemics between desire and denial, fascination rather than repulsion (Jackson 2004).

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#### Notes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jackson elaborates on Levi-Strauss's general theory of human relationships (Levi-Strauss: 1963: 95).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Winter (2002b) notes that the term *kathoey* originally included homosexuals and effeminate males but nowadays denotes "male to female transgender."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Note here, that in Thailand *kathoey* are not allowed to marry men. Therefore, the chances of possible matrimony are more likely with male foreigners rather than with Thai nationals.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Matzner (2002) asserts that a lack of literal and oral information on *kathoey* has made it difficult to locate their place in pre-modern Thai society.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> This story was found in Matzner (2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Such marriages carry no legal status (Winter 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Karen Drodge. June 2005. "All Eyes on the Queer Guys." The Big Chilli Magazine.

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- 18 İbid.
- 19 Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> http://www.glbtq.com/social-sciences/thailand.html.
- <sup>21</sup> http://www.missinternationalqueen.com/tiffany.htm.
- <sup>23</sup> http://www.missinternationalgueen.com/tiffany.htm.
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- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>30</sup> http://www.geocities.com/polfilms/beautifulboxer.html.
- 31 http://www.longvangclub.org/thailand/Typhuan/nongtoom.html.
- <sup>32</sup> Julian Gearing, "Sleeper Hit With a Heart," Asiaweek.com magazine. May 5, 2000, 26 http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/magazine/2000/0505/as Vol. No. 17.
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# "It's My Body and I'll Show It If I Want To": The Politics of Language in the Autobiographies of Dorothy Dandridge, Diahann Carroll, and Whoopi Goldberg

Whoopi Goldberg opts for a descriptive discussion of scatology, feminine hygiene, and sex in her autobiography *Book* (1997). Along the way, Goldberg sprinkles in delightful vignettes about her family and home and provocative political insights as well. Goldberg selects, so to speak, a "spreadeagled" approach, exercising a kind of agency in relation to her body, given that her body represents at least a potential source of pleasure for her. *Book* is a politics of language, and it compares interestingly to the tantalizing language used by Dorothy Dandridge and Diahann Carroll in their autobiographies *Everything and Nothing: The Dorothy Dandridge Tragedy with Earl Conrad* (1970) and *Diahann! with Ross Firestone* (1986). Goldberg's politics of language claim a powerful stance in linguistic territories set aside for men. Generally, "locker room" talk, for example, is in the exclusive realm of the masculine wherein men generally brag to each other about their sexual prowess and exploits. Goldberg's celebrity autobiography jockeys for a space of linguistic equality as she moves her text into a landscape reserved for men.

Comparatively, Goldberg, as a star, challenges Hollywood's prescription for stardom and this challenge complements, if not explains, her performative autobiographical text. Black women who desired stardom in the film industry no doubt had to fit a particular idea established by it. As film historian Donald Bogle notes, the 1940s and the 1950s ushered in an era of glamour. "During this era," he states, "Hollywood had very set notions about beauty standards, to which all female stars were expected to conform. It became almost a generic beauty look..." (Bogle, Dorothy Dandridge 122). This "generic beauty look" became a mainstay and still operates, though modified, in contemporary entertainment culture. Popular White actresses such as Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Jayne Mansfield, and Marilyn Monroe dominated the scene and set the standard for the White screen goddess as contemporary White actresses Nicole Kidman, Kate Hudson, Charlize Theron and, more recently, Scarlett Johansson do today.

Any Black woman in entertainment desiring stardom has to emulate the industry's "set notions about beauty standards." Dandridge embodies the star image in the 40s and 50s and Carroll carries it through to the nth degree in the 1980s. Whoopi Goldberg, however, slashed Hollywood's standard *look* in the 1980s and 1990s and, in its stead, offered up to the public a personality and star image that Audrey Edwards, editor-at-large of *Essence* magazine, termed as "[t]he dark-skinned, dreadlocked, gap-toothed, hoodoo-acting woman . . ." (58).

Goldberg gave the public a dose of her "hoodoo" act at the 1993 New York Friars Club Roast in her honor. Ted Danson, Goldberg's then boyfriend, Hollywood actor, and Master of Ceremonies "roasted" her in a tuxedo and, most blasphemous, in blackface! An excerpt from his "tribute" to her reads:

This morning I was shaving and wondering what I was gonna say this afternoon, and Whoopi was giving me a blow job. . . . I know comparisons are odious but, uh, I gotta tell ya, black chicks sure do know their way around a dick. I suppose in all fairness, that's because White girls get toys at Christmas (Dougherty 230).

In her closing remarks to the roast, Goldberg says:

I give good head. I make no bones about it. Those of you who have had it know I'm telling the truth—and that's why [Ted] got me...'cause he knew how to elongate that cumming (Dougherty 233).

More jarring is Goldberg's admission that she wrote Danson's skit and suggested he wear blackface.

The discourses Dandridge, Carroll, and Goldberg use in the description of intimate relationships in their autobiographies illustrate the contrast between the three women entertainers. The overall narratives of bedroom romps in *Everything and Nothing* and *Diahann!* emerge fairytale-like. The language carefully wraps and secures each woman's privacy. Second, Dandridge and Carroll carry forward the legacies of ladyhood. These legacies include the aspects of delicateness and caution in speech and action. Dandridge and Carroll keep the integrity of their own ladyhood images. Along the way, their autobiographies cast the prominent men of Hollywood as spectacles, idols, knights in shining armor, and even wolves in sheep's clothing.

In her autobiography, Dandridge relates how she "studied" Austrianborn director Otto Preminger over champagne in her apartment while contemplating the lead in the film *Carmen Jones* (dir. Otto Preminger 1954). The depiction of romance with the prolific filmmaker is most subdued. Dandridge recalls, "[b]y one or two o'clock in the morning, we had consumed much champagne. My hand was in his. Otto talked on in a warm, accented way, gently, in words I don't clearly recall . . . [b]ut this was a man. He was physical, all-male—no problem there. . . . That night I became his girl" (162). Dandridge affirms Preminger is "all-male"—insinuating she inspects his penis. There is "no problem there"—she identifies the penis and indicates an erection she validates as pleasing and functional. Becoming "his girl" in the end signals she and Preminger consummate their relationship. It is the perfect denouement to this erotic event.

In *Diahann!*, Carroll tells of her first meeting with Black screen idol Sidney Poitier:

The door opened. He stepped inside. My life changed. The first thing I saw was a man who moved like an animal, an incredibly beautiful self-confident, jet black man with the satin skin of a panther... His presence was so mesmerizing, his whole bearing so unashamedly sexual, that I was totally overtaken by the moment.... I must have crossed and uncrossed my legs a hundred times as he went around the room saying hello. Finally, it was my turn (5).

Carroll remembers how she and Poitier would stay up an entire night laughing and talking and making love (122), but Carroll wrote no explicit language about the lovemaking.

Carroll's narration charges Poitier with animal eroticism and magnetism. The striking particulars of the scene operate as sexual metaphors for the female genitalia and sexual intercourse: "The door opened" (vagina); "he stepped inside" (sexual intercourse); "my life changed" (orgasm). Carroll's emphasis on Poitier's physiology is interesting in view of the foundation of Poitier's screen success. During America's integrationist period (replete with the continued lynchings of African American males), Poitier represents to Hollywood and to White America the safe, controlled, and intelligent Negro—a necessary paradigm to quell White fear of Black male masculinity. In essence, Poitier's controlled cinematic image gives the film industry a safety net against the virility of the Black male. But what are we to make of Carroll's references to Hollywood's Black darling in terms of animal imagery? Even though her references immediately bring to mind the historical incantations that the Black male is but a savage, brutal beast, Carroll nevertheless subverts Poitier's muted screen persona; she cloaks him in sexuality and sensuality, within and against racial stereotype. In a way, Carroll's gender and race privileges her to situate Poitier in such a vigorously sensual manner. The specific image of a panther attributed to Poitier symbolizes a virile and erect big black dick, present for Carroll's visual and, more specifically, personal gratification.

The Preminger and Poitier portraitures invert Laura Mulvey's exemplar that outlines female film spectatorship as "active/male and passive/female." Mulvey asserts, "[t]he determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (62). Instead, Dandridge and Carroll enact bell hooks's "oppositional gaze," whereby the Black female spectator affirms agency in the experience of looking. hooks declares, "[s]paces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both integrate the gaze of the other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see" (248). The authors' written "I" (eye) enables Dandridge and Carroll to perform as desiring subjects rather than as desired objects. The act of Black women looking back and naming what they see empowers them as agents of the gaze. Dandridge preempts authority from the powerful White

director Preminger; Carroll restores sexual prowess to Poitier's staid cinematic persona.

Whoopi Goldberg's *Book* unabashedly exposes the personal areas Dandridge and Carroll refuse to discuss. As an autobiographer, Goldberg casts the most delicate "private parts" into the public sphere with reckless abandon. The comedienne's aggressive exhibition of the penis and vagina places sex and the myriad performances of it front and center for her audience. Goldberg announces on the inside flap of the dust jacket that she intends to skirt "ladylike" discretion: "I tell you, in my own inimitable way, how uproarious and provocative this book is, how out there, and cutting edge, and whatever else I can think to throw into the mix." This reckless abandonment is Goldberg's signal of her intention to perpetuate the renegade image she instituted at the onset of her film career. Edwards asserts, "[Goldberg] . . . who is by turns both sexless and sensual . . . retains the skewed worldview of the comic, with a loopy disdain for convention and a wry 'screw you' attitude when it comes to considering what others may think" (58).

Book's dust jacket presents the comedienne with an unconventional look that fails to match what Bogle refers to as the Hollywood standard of beauty; yet the text showcases a sensual and thoughtful Goldberg. In a visual culture that traditionally adores and reveres the looks of White womanhood and, subsequently, of those Black actresses and entertainers who possess White features (i.e., Halle Berry, Jada Pinkett-Smith, former Miss America Vanessa Williams, and song-stylist Alicia Keyes, to name a few), Goldberg is a virtual iconoclast. Book allows Goldberg's nisus to construct her own version of Hollywoodism and to interject an identity that flies in the face of Hollywood convention. In other words, Book gives the Black and White film and visual culture establishment the middle finger.

Goldberg's literary move is not without historical precedent. According to literary critic Françoise Lionnet's analysis, Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road (1942) complements the spirit of Goldberg's Book. Lionnet states Hurston refuses to conform to conventions of self-portraiture (i.e., a linear narrative recounting the events of a life). She prefers to inform the reader of who she was "or more precisely, how she [...had] become what she [...was]—an individual who ostensibly [...valued] her independence more than any kind of political commitment to a cause, especially the cause of 'Race Solidarity'..." (Lionnet 114). While Hurston does not come close to using the outrageous strategies Goldberg uses, Book dances with Hurston's spirit. Goldberg wantonly disregards convention and claims an independent spirit. These qualities have made for an autobiographical text that complicates our notions of celebrity and the written texts celebrities may produce.

Goldberg's autobiography defies the conventions of celebrity autobiography in almost every respect. An analysis of the narrative techniques in *Everything and Nothing* and *Diahann!* discloses that Dandridge and Carroll

manage a safe distance from their readership, thereby preserving images of the Black screen goddess in the White goddess ideal. The alluring photos on the front and back dust jackets show Dandridge and Carroll as epitomes of beauty, dignity, and exquisite Black ladyhood. Carroll, for example, is photographed most seductively. The book's title *Diahann!* is emblazoned in upper-case bold red letters on the front dust jacket.

Goldberg breaks the mold beginning with the dust jacket. The text's title and the name of the author appear embossed on the spine rather than on the front cover. The extreme close-up iris shot of Goldberg's dark brown face and dark berry lips on the dust jacket presents her looking directly at the reader, sans a smile. On the back cover, the extreme close-up head shot exhibits Goldberg winking at the reader with a Cheshire cat smile; her dreadlocks are splayed in nimbus fashion.

The musical term "Riffs"—the title of the table of contents—signals Goldberg's main intent: to be raw, direct, and to the point. Yet, interestingly, Goldberg gives the reader no visual access to her full body: there are no family or celebrity photos within the text. Her denial of visual gratification forces the reader to visualize through the author's narrative sketches and through the narrative techniques of naming, detailing, and description. In effect, we absorb Goldberg through words and ideas only, and they are unaccompanied by high-gloss publicity photos and her body. Thus, of her own volition, Goldberg skirts a construction of the celebrity glamour-girl image made standard in autobiographical texts written by Black women in entertainment.

The riffs of particular interest are "Wind," "Head," "Sex," and "Dick." In the aggregate, these sketches give voice to those activities and desires that are usually only articulated within the private sphere.

In "Wind," Goldberg undertakes a discussion of the bodily function of farting; the anus and all of its characteristic effluvia are addressed: "We all fart, right? But we don't like to talk about it.... Why is that?" (7). The sketch moves forward with a discussion of fart venues (elevators, buses, cabs, subways, and under the bedcovers); fart etiquette ("You shouldn't be allowed to drop one of those silent killers and not claim it" [10]); and, fart sounds (power dumps or slow and silent). "Head" and "Dick" deliver an unabashed excursion into the obnoxious proclivities of (White) men in bathrooms with Goldberg as witness to the performing penis. She writes, "No one wants to be found out during the obbaby period. Men... don't leave their crusty underwear on the floor, they don't piss in the sink. Yes, men actually piss in the sink" (29).

"Sex" is a treatise on the pros of masturbation, and the beauty of satisfying the body's sexual desires follows. She writes, "We all do 'feel good' things to ourselves, or to our partners, and that's cool as long as we're all consenting adults about it. Whatever feels good, you know." (119). Consider this sketch: "I was once married to a guy who couldn't give head to save his life. I was busting to tell him, 'Get a Life Saver and put your tongue through it, motherfucker. That's all you gotta do'" (137).

These vignettes can be dismissed as Goldberg performing stand-up comedy; after all, she is a comedienne. Examined within a larger historical context of popular culture, however, Goldberg's literary venture begs for a more critical review. The Black woman's vagina was considered only for its ability to accommodate the Black penis for breeding purposes during the slave regime and for its availability to the White colonialist penis. In the case of Sarah Bartmann, an African girl displayed in a cage half-naked as the Hottentot Venus in England and Paris, the Black woman's vagina became the site of medical curiosity by European physicians and scientists as it was exhibited in the realm of popular culture. Bartmann's genitalia was prodded, probed, and ultimately dissected upon her death as nineteenth century European anthropologists and medical doctors scrambled to prove differences between Black and White, and, in particular to prove ludicrous theories regarding Black women's inherent lasciviousness (Gilman 76-93). The Black woman's vagina, then, is a space of male entitlement. The vagina, moreover, is but an attachment to a body, a piece of flesh for the deposit of semen. It is an organ for the reproduction of chattel in the slave economy, an organ of pleasure for others, and a specimen for study and display over the course of time.

Goldberg reclaims the dismembered pieces of Black female genitalia. She dissects them then parades them in full view of the reader. Goldberg critiques the sexual performance (and lack thereof) of her male lovers and boasts of her sexual skill at the Friars Club roast. Her critique intrigues the reader since the men to whom Goldberg has been married, and with whom she has been linked publicly, are White male actors: Lyle Trachtenberg (ex-husband), Ted Danson, Timothy Dalton, and Frank Langella. *Book*, then, complements the popular tabloids, "outing," so to speak, the private (and gross) activities of popular actors. Though Goldberg refrains from directly naming the actors, she piques our curiosity over the author of these behaviors. Are Danson, Dalton, and Langella the obnoxious men who piss in the sink? Which one is skittish about performing oral sex? Does Trachtenberg wear crusty underwear? Did Whoopi convince Ted Danson to use the lifesaver to "play around down there"? (137).

In the riff "Sex," Goldberg gets serious about masturbation and oral sex as an alternative to sexual intercourse:

Former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders took a lot of shit for suggesting masturbation should be taught in schools, but what's wrong with that? People lit into ol' Joycelyn for saying masturbation was a viable way for young people to experiment sexually without the risk of infection or pregnancy, but it is... If we're gonna tell our kids to abstain from sexual intercourse, then we owe them some alternatives.... And why stop with masturbation? Let's teach them how to do it to each other too. (119)

Goldberg's critique of the Clinton administration's and the public's disdain for Surgeon General Elders's recommendation that masturbation serve as a conduit to safe sex reminds us that the Puritan principles of the seventeenth century still govern America's stance on sex in the twentieth century. Her assessment of the public's reaction to the Surgeon General's recommendation as well as her conclusion that we "owe" America's youth another possible choice for self-gratification, campaigns for the public to consider America's youth as a group worthy of real dialogue. It is easy to encourage an adolescent to just say no to sex; masturbation takes sheer courage to discuss on a national level since the act comes historically charged with negative connotations. Goldberg declares that "[w]e still carry a lot of fucked-up Puritan baggage about... masturbation" (140).

The diaries of Puritan Michael Wigglesworth reveal his anxieties over his desires to masturbate and those uncontrollable night dreams. He laments, "I find such irresistible torments of carnal lusts or provocation unto the ejection of seed... The last night a filthy dream and so pollution escaped me in my sleep for which I desire to hang my head with shame..."(4). Major minister and personality of the Puritan era, Cotton Mather, warned adolescents against "unclean" behavior: "Beware of having light thoughts about some sorts of Uncleanness wherein many young people have been so infatuated as to excuse themselves. There are abominable self-pollutions..." (Elliott 36).

The language of these Puritan authors illustrates that Goldberg rightly detects that the Puritan legacy of attitudes on sex inhibits our ability to have an open discussion about masturbation. Masturbation bears a negative linguistic history; it is an abominable unclean self-pollution performed in private. For Goldberg, Elders's recommendation to the nation in public brought up these Puritan beliefs. Yet, even though Mather deems masturbation obscene, Emory Elliot (literary critic of Puritan literature) notes, "[t]he very fact that Mather felt free to speak out openly on the subject and even to preach an entire sermon on it at a later date indicates a more open atmosphere of discussion of the problem that in itself probably helped young people" (37). Goldberg suggests Elders's public support for educating young adults on the benefits of masturbation is her gesture (like Mather's in the pulpit) to have that "open atmosphere of discussion" of the problem of teenage pregnancy. In Goldberg's estimation, the "shit" Elders took and her subsequent dismissal closed down the opportunity for real and honest dialogue with America's youth about alternatives to sex.

Goldberg, indeed, revels in the discussion of sexual politics, yet she is also unequivocal in her rhetoric on politics and race relations. The riff "Trust" forms a link with the political climate of the 1990s and Bill Clinton's presidency. "Trust" also queries the public's preoccupation with the alleged sexual exploits of America's past presidents at the expense of more important aspects of the president's overall performance:

I don't care how many people our presidents have slept with. It doesn't take away from who they are or what they're about or what they might accomplish.... It's just part of the human package.... Do we believe in what [... President Clinton] stands for, and in what he's trying to accomplish? Or do we just slap another scarlet letter on yet another person just to help us to feel a little better about ourselves? (17, 23)

This richly comedic treatment recognizes the naturalness of sex. It also offers that the power of the mind overrides the supposed power of sex. Goldberg, furthermore, reminds America of its hero-worship and its disallowance of human frailties. Thus, Goldberg undermines the perceived potency and magic of sexual intercourse, which "suddenly" transforms people in power into reckless human beings.

While Dandridge and Carroll specify rough instances in their autobiographies, these women tell their stories with quiet reserve and distance, sans raunchy intimacies. Goldberg's narrative style, however, insists on the reality of living rooted in the basic rituals of our physical presence. The "in your face" narrative makes it obvious that contained within life's neat little packages is the urge to fart in the most unlikely places.

Goldberg's autobiography pulls back one more panel of life's experiences, and Book grants a venue for readers to shout, along with the comedienne: Hey, it's MY body, and I'll show it if I want to. Yeah, I was born and I'm living, but on my journey I get laid, fart and wipe myself after I defecate and urinate. And, guess what? You do too, so let's go to our own locker room and talk about every itty-bitty detail! Why should men have all the fun? Her position as a comedienne gives her license to open these personal packages, and to add those "riffs" that we want to leave unpacked. Goldberg tells us that underneath the deodorant, our stench accompanies us wherever we are.

Of course no one wants to smell or see the stuff that Goldberg has thrown at us, but that is just the point. Because we do not want to, we almost never do, and thus a whole set of human desires, foibles, problems, accidents, painful situations, and illnesses are masked under the smiling assertion that everything is fine, nothing smells, and no one is hurt. More often than not, society pretends that no one is going crazy.

In "Word," Goldberg lobbies for the desensitization of racist terms such as "nigger" and "hymie"—pejorative terms used to signify the African American and Jewish communities:

Take the word nigger. Now, I've never been a nigger. Don't really know what a nigger is.... Maybe other people have thought that I was a nigger, but that's their definition. And yet people hear the word nigger and they run from it, or they're stopped by it, or they get an attitude about it. Why? Is it because deep down, you feel it's true? If that's the case, then why is it okay if a person calls himself a nigger? Does that

make it a term of inclusion, and if so what exactly are we including ourselves in? (185)

#### She continues:

[Jesse Jackson] came out and called New York "Hymie-town" and people were ready to light him on fire... Hymie-town should not have been an insult, because there is no Hymietown. Maybe there's Hymie Smith, you know, but there's no Hymie-town. (190, 191)

These vignettes are surprising. It seems for Goldberg names have no history or power in their invocation. Yet Goldberg obviously recognizes the efficacy of words, and Book is a testament to the comedienne's recognition. The written word is efficacious, and Goldberg's invocation of Hester Prynne's punishment in Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic The Scarlet Letter bears evidence of Goldberg's understanding of the harmful impact of labeling, branding, and naming. As critics Ferdinand M. De Leon and Sally MacDonald claim, "[t]he labels we use affect how others perceive us and how we see ourselves; they are used by those in power to define the rest even as they struggle to define themselves" (65). Correspondingly, Maya Angelou poignantly chronicles the distaste Black people have in being called anything other than their given names. A White employer with a lazy tongue regarded Angelou's name too difficult to pronounce and cavalierly assigned her another name. Angelou retorts, "[e]very person I knew had a hellish horror of being 'called out of his name.' It was a dangerous practice to call a Negro anything that could be loosely construed as insulting because of the centuries of their having been called niggers, jigs, dinges, blackbirds, crows, boots and spooks" (23). In other words, labels like "nigger," "hymie," "spic," and "kike" come charged with history.

Certainly Goldberg's celebrity status affords her the luxury to disregard these words, but I hesitate to conclude she is so insensitive as to want to disavow their harmful effects. Given the complexity of her work and what we know about her career, it seems unlikely that she would be oblivious to her situation and to the power of her words. One of the criticisms of "political correctness" do not utter "nigger" but say "the 'n' word" instead—is that it does not solve the problem of racial hatred but merely creates more hypocrisy and secrecy (i.e., a person does not speak the word but still thinks it). I think Goldberg asks, "Which is better?" Maybe—just maybe—we are better off knowing that Jesse has a problem with Jews or that Furman and many other White Los Angeles cops hate Black people. Maybe she is saying we would all have fewer intestinal problems if we could fart in public. Maybe she suggests that we express our prejudices so that they can be addressed and answered. By invoking the Puritans in America ("In the Puritan days, we dragged adulterers into the streets and put 'em in the stockades and posted a big old sign next to them describing their crime: FOR UNLAWFUL CARNAL KNOWLEDGE" [183]), Goldberg reminds America of the violence that has occurred in our nation's history because a group of people was labeled and punished. This labeling caused communities to virtually implode.

Goldberg's project *Book* no doubt complicates the general public's idea about public notoriety and the projection of female African American celebrity image in the genre of autobiography. Goldberg's discourses endow *Book* with a different quality of storytelling, separate and apart from the sugarcoated portraits presented by Dandridge and Carroll. The conjoining of scatology with sensible advice about sex is evidence of Goldberg's efforts to construct a more comprehensive African American female. Somehow, *Book* restores Sarah Bartmann, expands the dialogue Dandridge and Carroll began, and permits women to engage in bawdy language. It's ok. For sure, Dandridge and Carroll manage to retain the perfect assembled Hollywood persona at the end of their texts, and this complies with film culture's building of entertainment images. Together, the language of Dandridge, Carroll, and Goldberg asserts a Black woman's power in looking... and ... talking.

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### The New Journalism of the Sixties: Reevaluating Objective Reality and Conventional Journalistic Practice

#### Introduction

Although objectivity traditionally has been an important value of American journalism, the social and political turmoil of the 1960s prompted some journalists to reevaluate conventional techniques of news gathering and reporting. An increasing number of journalists found the technical constraints of the reporter as a detached observer recording contemporary history in the formulaic inverted-pyramid style inadequate in capturing the "social hemorrhaging" that was taking place in 1960s America. If indeed the "center was not holding" —spawning a nation of subcultures, alternative lifestyles, sexual and drug experimentation, and dissent from members of the anti-Vietnam War, civil rights, and feminist movements—then experimentation in reportage was considered necessary to describe the fragmented social reality.

Labeled problematically as the "New Journalism," the experimentation found reporters in the mid-to-late Sixties employing the techniques of the novelist to tell a true story. Just as the American novel of the 1930s sought to capture the gritty nuances of realism, <sup>6</sup> so too did New Journalism works strive to cut below the surface of superficiality and examine the way people behave in revealing moments. Journalist Gay Talese observes that although the New Journalism reads like fiction, it should be as reliable as conventional reportage. She notes that experimental reportage seeks a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotations, and adherence to the rigid organizational style of traditional newswriting. Talese adds: "The New Journalism allows, demands in fact, a more imaginative approach to reporting, and it permits the writer to inject himself into the narrative if he wishes... or to assume the role of a detached observer..."8 In the former style, the writer's emotions and reactions to the social reality that is unfolding becomes central to the narrative. This "reality" is filtered through the thought processes and senses of the reporter, then presented to the reader as personal sense-making, rather than omnipresent sense-making. Meanwhile, the detached observer form finds the reporter following his subjects unobtrusively, observing their reactions and the reactions of others to them. The goal is to absorb the whole scene—the dialogue, the mood, the tension, drama, or conflict—and then write it all from the point of view of the persons being observed.9 Talese writes that many New Journalists try whenever possible to reveal what individuals are thinking during the moments being described. He adds, "This latter insight is not obtainable, of course, without the full cooperation of the subject, but if the writer enjoys the confidence and trust of his

subjects, it is possible, through interviews, by asking the right question at the right time, to learn and to report what goes on within other people's minds."<sup>10</sup>

Tom Wolfe, one of the innovators of the New Journalism genre, points out that the reporter chronicling the societal turmoil of the Sixties could not successfully fulfill his journalistic obligations by observing reality from the grandstands. Instead, Wolfe encourages reporters to wade into the swamp of everyday contemporary life, where reporting can be "tedious, messy, physically dirty, boring, dangerous even." He adds:

The reporter starts out by presuming upon someone's privacy, asking questions he has no right to expect an answer to—and no sooner has he lowered himself that far than already he has become a supplicant with his cup out, waiting for information or something to happen, hoping to be tolerated long enough to get what he needs, adapting his personality to the situation, being ingratiating, obliging, charming, whatever seems to be called for, enduring taunts, abuse, even the occasional roughing up in the eternal eagerness for "the story"—behavior that comes close to being servile or even beggarly.<sup>12</sup>

Wolfe is calling for a comprehensive reporting style that enables a journalist to portray scenes, extensive dialogue, status life, and emotional life, in addition to the usual data of the essay-narrative. He places special emphasis on the New Journalist's ability to capture scenes of social reality. Whereas the information compiled is of primary concern in conventional journalism, it becomes of secondary importance in New Journalism. More precisely, Wolfe says the New Journalist's main problem is "managing to stay with whomever you are writing about long enough for the scenes to take place before your own eyes." Accomplishing this task is not so much a matter of mastering certain rules or craft secrets, as it is a test of the reporter's personality. Wolfe asserts:

Reporting never becomes any easier simply because you have done it many times. The initial problem is always to approach total strangers, move in on their lives in some fashion, ask questions you have no right to expect answers to, ask to see things you weren't meant to see.<sup>16</sup>

Along with utilizing novelistic techniques, capturing the scenes of everyday life, examining the psyches of real-life characters, and employing saturation reporting to chronicle societal nuances, the New Journalist also calls upon ego to accomplish the journalistic task. Wolfe contends that a writer needs enough ego to believe that what he is doing as a writer is as important as what anyone he is writing about is doing. He notes that adding ego into the New Journalism equation prevents the reporter from compromising his own work. Wolfe adds, "If he doesn't believe that his own writing is one of the most

important activities going on in contemporary civilization, then he ought to move on to something else he thinks is . . ... 17

Although a number of journalists have experimented with these impressionistic techniques of reportage, this article will examine the works of five writers who attempted to chronicle the fragmentation of American culture in the 1960s. In so doing, they placed into question the worth of conventional forms of reporting that rely on objectivity, a formulaic approach to newswriting, and the neutral observer who strives not to become part of the story. The following works were selected because of their focus on specific historical events of the Sixties, or their emphasis on subcultures of that decade: Joan Didion's Slouching Towards Bethlehem and The White Album, Tom Wolfe's The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream, Normal Mailer's The Armies of the Night and Miami and the Siege of Chicago, and Michael Herr's Dispatches. Each of these works hinge thematically on the recognition that the conventional ways of confronting social reality in contemporary America no longer apply. For the New Journalists of the Sixties, notions of an empirical reality rang hollow in the midst of a society that was tearing itself apart by assassinations, riots, racism, sexism, and a proxy war in Southeast Asia that killed and maimed thousands of American soldiers. Instead, writers like Didion. Wolfe, Thompson, Mailer, and Herr recognized that only a subjective reality could begin to make sense out of a society in which chaos and disorder dominated the headlines and the evening news.

#### Social Fragmentation: The Essays of Joan Didion

In their pursuit of the social reality of the Sixties, the New Journalists thematically focused on, to varying degrees, the widening fissures in contemporary American culture. These fissures symbolize an America that was socially, politically, and spiritually adrift. The fullest treatment of this theme is expressed in Joan Didion's collections of essays, Slouching Towards Bethlehem and The White Album. Here, she seeks the evidence of atomization 18—the proof that everything eventually falls apart. Although establishing her reputation as a novelist. Didion turns to the impressionistic essay to try to come to grips with societal disorder. 19 For her, the center of American society was no longer holding. Divisions ran so deep in the Sixties that, from Didion's perspective, uncertainty, chaos, and a sense of aimlessness haunted the American spirit. She places herself at the focal point of most of these essays, underscoring her own inability to make sense out of a badly fragmented society. Only by coming to grips with the disorder in her own life could she begin to understand the chaos occurring throughout society. In fact, Didion notes that writing the title essay from Slouching Towards Bethlehem was an emotionally cathartic experience:

I was in fact as sick as I have ever been when I was writing Slouching Towards Bethlehem; the pain kept me awake at

night and so for twenty and twenty-one hours a day I drank gin-and-hot water to blunt the pain and took Dexedrine to blunt the gin and wrote the piece. I would like you to believe that I kept working out of some real professionalism, to meet the deadline, but that would not be entirely true; I did have a deadline, but it was also a troubled time, and working did to the trouble what gin did to the pain.<sup>20</sup>

Utilizing the novelist's eye for detail, nuance, and irony, Didion's essays examine a fundamental lack of connectedness in the Sixties experience. Early in the twentieth century, Americans achieved a sense of connectedness by existing in a "community in place" where emotional and spiritual sustenance was provided by family members, neighbors, church members, and coworkers—all of whom lived in the same community from birth to death. With support systems that were fixed in place and could continually be called upon, a greater sense of certainty and order prevailed. However, as of the 1960s, Americans have lacked a sense of connectedness by existing in a "community in space," where the major systems of support (in terms of gaining information, advice, knowledge, and wisdom) are the mass media, rather than a grandfather, pastor, or long-time neighbor. The America Didion chronicles is a nomadic one—both physically and spiritually—where lives are continually being uprooted either in the incessant search for identity, or as a means of escaping disappointment or failure when the American Dream sours.

The concept of atomization in the Sixties—the notion that the center of society is not holding—is fleshed out in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. The essay chronicles the Haight-Ashbury scene in San Francisco in 1967. For Didion, San Francisco is where the "social hemorrhaging" was showing up. Only by confronting disorder face-to-face could she come to terms with the disorder of her own life—a personal disorder that at the time left her "paralyzed by the conviction that writing was an irrelevant act, that the world as I had understood it no longer existed."<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Didion describes the societal disorder of 1967 in almost poetic fashion:

The center was not holding. It was a country of bankruptcy notices and public-auction announcements and commonplace reports of casual killings and misplaced children and abandoned homes and vandals who misspelled even the four-letter words they scrawled. It was country in which families routinely disappeared, trailing bad checks and repossession papers. Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never now learn the games that had held the society together. People were missing. Children were missing. Parents were missing. Those

left behind filed desultory missing-person reports, then moved on themselves.<sup>24</sup>

During her stay in Haight-Ashbury, Didion talks with hippies, teen-age runaways, drug users, self-proclaimed revolutionaries, political activists, rock musicians, and various denizens of the counterculture movement—each one serving as a flesh-and-blood symbol of the societal fractures taking place. In the fullest sense of the New Journalism style, Didion calls upon the lyrical qualities of the novelist to capture, in a highly realistic manner, scenes of 1960s street life. Through extensive use of dialogue and descriptive detail (clothing worn, music played, rooms slept in, streets roamed), Didion captures the feel of rootlessness and aimlessness that was a part of everyday life in the Haight-Ashbury district. These techniques are apparent in the following passage from *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*:

Steve is troubled by a lot of things. He is twenty-three, was raised in Virginia, and has the idea that California is the beginning of the end. "I feel it's insane," he says, and his voice drops. "This chick tells me there's no meaning to life but it doesn't matter. We'll just flow right out. There've been times I felt like packing up and taking off for the East Coast again, at least there I had a target. At least there you can expect that it's going to happen." He lights a cigarette for me and his hands shake. "Here you know it's not going to." I ask what it is that is supposed to happen. "I don't know," he says. "Something. Anything." 25

While the essays in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* ask more questions about the nature or cause of social fragmentation than provide answers, Didion prefers to characterize it as more of a moral, rather than social or political, dilemma. This is particularly evident in the essay, "On Self-Respect," in which Didion says that many contemporary Americans lack a "moral nerve" that their ancestors possessed. She observes that people with self-respect exhibit a moral toughness that can be termed "character." More precisely, Didion defines character as the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own actions in life. <sup>26</sup> For Didion, self-respect also entails the recognition that anything worth having in life has its price:

People who respect themselves are willing to accept the risk that the Indians will be hostile, that the venture will go bankrupt, that the liaison may not turn out to be one in which every day is a holiday because you're married to me. They are willing to invest something of themselves; they may not play at all, but when they do play, they know the odds.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Didion characterized 1960s America as a nation whose people were either too immature or undisciplined to take responsibility for or accept the

consequences of their mistakes and failures. Extending the idea to the societal level, true self-respect comes from admitting the folly of American involvement in the Vietnam War, racism, sexism, and the upsurge of urban violence, and then understanding the price to be paid for insensitivity. Here Didion as the reporter turns objectivity inside out, calling upon herself as the "source" of her information on the subject of self-respect. Didion adds:

To live without self-respect is to lie awake some night, beyond the reach of warm milk, phenobarbital, and the sleeping hand on the coverlet, counting up the sins of commission and omission, the trusts betrayed, the promises subtly broken, the gift irrevocably wasted through sloth or cowardice or carelessness. However long we postpone it, we eventually lie down alone in that notoriously uncomfortable bed, the one we make ourselves. Whether or not we sleep in it depends, of course, on whether or not we respect ourselves.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, Didion's follow-up collection of essays on the Sixties, *The White Album*, again calls upon novelistic narration and the subjective positioning of the writer to chronicle moral stagnation and social disorder. In the title essay about the late 1960s, Didion asserts that many Americans were troubled by the recognition that every story they had been told about what constitutes happiness and the American Dream began to ring false. The "scripts" for one's role in society were being mislaid as of 1968; "cues" were no longer being heard or understood. Instead, people were having to improvise their lives. Life under the American Dream was supposed to have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end, but by the late Sixties the "plot" consisted of little more than a "cutting-room experience." Didion notes: "In what would probably be the middle of my life, I wanted still to believe in the narrative and the narrative's intelligibility, but to know that one could change the sense with every cut was to begin to perceive the experience as rather more electrical than ethical." <sup>30</sup>

The theme of the breakdown of individual and societal narrative flows throughout the "White Album" essay, with Didion wandering through the turbulent landscape of California during the late Sixties to eyewitness the disintegration of certainty. The diverse elements of this landscape include the San Francisco State College protests, the rock group The Doors, singer Janis Joplin, Eldridge Cleaver, and Manson follower Linda Kasabian. In reference to the latter, Didion utilizes the Tate-LaBianca murders by the Charles Manson family in 1969 as the quintessential metaphor for disorder. Nothing she had ever learned could adequately prepare Didion for the brutality perpetrated by the Manson family: "Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969, ended at the exact moment when word of the murders on Cielo Drive traveled like brushfire through the community, and in a sense this is true. The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled." Part

autobiography, part confession, part reportage, "The White Album" examines late 1960s history through the use of internal, or psychic, "artifacts"; an impressionistic approach to history in which much of the "evidence" resides within the psyche of the historian. Once again, any notion of the historian/reporter engaging in objective sense-making has been dismissed.

#### Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, and the Subcultures Decade

The social fragmentation of the Sixties that Didion chronicles also gave way to a nation of subcultures, with New Journalists Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson the major innovators in writing about this phenomenon. Since World War II, massive infusions of money have flowed into numerous levels of society. Classes of people whose lifestyles had been nondescript suddenly had the money to "build monuments to their own styles." By the 1960s, this money boom fueled teen-agers' ability to create their own subcultures, which took the form of "custom cars, the Twist, the Jerk, the Monkey, the Shake, rock music generally, stretch pants, decal eyes..." More importantly, the teen-age lifestyles of the Sixties began having an influence on the life of the entire country. As Wolfe observes in the introduction of his collection of essays on 1960s subcultures, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*:

Nobody seems to know quite what to call it, but the term that is catching on is Pop Society, this is because socialites in New York today seem to have no natural, aristocratic styles of their own—they are taking all their styles from "pop" groups, which stands for popular, or "vulgar" or "bohemian" group. They dance the Jerk, the Monkey, the Shake, they listen to rock music, the women wear teen-age and even "subteen" styles... they draw their taste in art, such as "underground" movies and "pop" painting, from carious bohos and camp cultural, mainly. 35

However, the subculture phenomenon of the Sixties was not limited to teenagers; Wolfe describes it spreading to all aspects of Americana, including stock car racing, gambling, boxing, the art world, and high society. Levels of the American experience previously submerged in obscurity emerged in the Sixties "out of the vinyl deeps." The eccentric new lifestyles succeeded in rising above the elite-dominated culture of the past. Thus, Wolfe's reportage portrays not only the ascendance of pop culture, but the struggle of the older cultural guard to preserve the forms of its status. More importantly, however, is the lasting impact that the pop culture has had on mainstream America; in many instances, the "pop" has become a legitimized part of the "mainstream." For example, Wolfe notes that long after Las Vegas's influence as a gambling mecca has passed, the city's forms and symbols will be influencing American life:

That fantastic skyline! Las Vegas's neon sculpture, its fantastic fifteen-story-high display signs, parabolas,

boomerangs, rhomboids, trapezoids, and all the rest of it, are already the staple design of the American landscape outside of the oldest parts of the oldest cities. They are all over every suburb, every subdivision, every highway... They are the new landmarks of America, the new guideposts, the new way Americans get their bearing.<sup>38</sup>

Relying on a hyperactive writing style that is punctuated by an obsessive use of exclamation points, ellipses, italicized words, capitalization, word sounds (such as Varoom! Hmmmmmmm! Urgggggggghhhhhh!), Wolfe abandons conventional nonfiction storytelling to paint a detailed portrait of the subjective reality of American subcultures that have been ignored by mainstream reportage. For example, in his essay, "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't Hear You! Too Noisy!) Las Vegas!!!," Wolfe roams the casinos, streets, jails, bars, and clubs of Las Vegas to illustrate that Vegas is much more than simply gambling; that it is, in fact, a metaphor for a troubled, restless, overly affluent society. Wolfe's description of his visit to the Clark County Courthouse underscores this theme:

I am on the third floor of the Clark County Courthouse talking to Sheriff Captain Ray Gubser, another of these strong, pale-eyed Western-builder types, who is obligingly explaining to me law enforcement on the Strip, where the problem is not so much the drunks, crooks or roughhousers, but these nuts on pills who don't want to ever go to bed, and they have hallucinations and try to bring down the casinos like Samson. The county has two padded cells for them, they cool down after three or four days and they turn out to be somebody's earnest breadwinner back in Denver or Minneapolis, loaded with the right credentials and pouring soul and apologiae all over the county cops before finally pulling out of the never-never land for good by plane.<sup>39</sup>

Wolfe is particularly interested in the allure of Las Vegas, and in his interviews with gamblers and tourists from throughout the country, he concludes that the primary allure is liberation. This allure of liberation is most irresistible not to the young, but the old. Wolfe points out that although it is not the glamorous image of the city, Las Vegas is basically a resort for old people. "In those last years," he writes, "before the tissue deteriorated and the wires of the cerebral cortex hang in the skull like a clump of dried seaweed, they are seeking liberation." Here, psychological interpretation becomes part of the reporter's arsenal in penetrating subjective reality. Within the constraints of conventional news reporting—where facts are to speak for themselves without elucidation by the reporter—such psychologizing is considered unprofessional journalistic conduct.

This technique of psychological interpretation is further refined in Wolfe's portrait of record producer Phil Spector, "The First Tycoon of Teen." In this essay, Wolfe describes Spector as a walking contradiction: on the one hand, the 23-year-old Spector identifies with the teen-age netherworld of rock and roll; on the other hand, Spector is the millionaire business genius, living in a New York penthouse and having a staff consisting of a bodyguard and a limousine chauffeur. He is a man who wants to maintain "the kids' style of life," yet have the adult's money. Wolfe concluded that no matter how much Spector covertly identifies with his teen-age fans, the producer has crossed over into "the universe of arteriosclerotic, hypocritical, cigar-chewing, hopeless, larded adults, infarcted vultures, one meets in the music business." In this piece, social commentary and psychological analysis are as much the domain of the reporter as it is the novelist.

The techniques experimented with in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* are later perfected in his book-length account of the psychedelic/counterculture movement in the Sixties, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.* Along with telling the story of Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters from the point of view of the characters portrayed, Wolfe also experiments with a stream of consciousness narrative. This is best illustrated in the scenes showing Kesey in hiding in Mexico after he had been arrested in California for the second time for possession of marijuana and faced a mandatory five-year jail sentence with no chance of parole. In a paranoic, stream-of-consciousness style, Wolfe depicts Kesey sitting in his hideaway convinced that Mexican federates or FBI agents are about to arrest him. Wolfe reconstructs the scene based on Kesey's letter to fellow writer Larry McMurtry, tapes made by Kesey, and interviews with Kesey's fugitive companions. Wolfe writes:

Haul ass, Kesey. Scram. Split flee hide vanish disintegrate. Like run.

Refressive review review review review review or are we gonna have just a late Mexican re-run of the scene on the rooftop in San Francisco and sit here with the motor spinning and watch with fascination while the cops they climb up once again to come git you—<sup>45</sup>

This stream-of-consciousness style also is employed in the "gonzo journalism" of Hunter S. Thompson, who, like Wolfe, examines the counterculture experience in the Sixties. For example, in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, Thompson employs a manic first-person style in which the writer's emotions tend to dominate the story. "This approach," Wolfe writes, "seldom grates in Thompson's hands, probably because Thompson, for all his surface ferocity, usually casts himself as a frantic loser, inept and half-psychotic, somewhat after the manner of Celine."

While reporters for the mainstream press were writing conventional news stories objectively chronicling drug experimentation and counterculture life in 1960s America, Thompson wrote of his own paranoia, fears, weaknesses, and follies to capture social upheaval. By writing of his own bouts with drugs and alcohol, he became a mirror for the experimentation that was part of the social fragmentation of the decade. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson and his attorney drive from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, where he is to cover the Mint 400 for a sports magazine. The story is not about the journalist covering the news event; instead, it describes one drug-oriented adventure after another in often surrealistic, stream-of-consciousness style. For example, in discussing preparations for the journey to Las Vegas, Thompson observes:

The sporting editors had also given me \$300 in cash, most of which was already spent on extremely dangerous drugs. The trunk of the car looked like a mobile police narcotics lab. We had two bags of grass, seventy-five pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multicolored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers . . . and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls. <sup>49</sup>

As the journey progresses, Thompson realizes that if experimentation equates with personal freedom, then the price for such freedom can be steep:

No sympathy for the devil; keep that in mind. Buy the ticket, take the ride... and if it occasionally gets a little heavier than what you had in mind, well... maybe chalk it off to forced consciousness expansion: Tune in, freak out, get beaten. It's all in Kesey's Bible.... The Far Side of Reality. 50

Like Wolfe, Thompson examines characters who exist on the fringes of the American experience. To chronicle their stories, both writers abandon all notions of objectivity in favor of a subjective reality that focuses on the point of view of the characters, or on the emotions and psyches of the authors.

## Norman Mailer and Michael Herr: Impressionistic Interpretations of Public Policy

Whereas Joan Didion's reportorial landscape entailed an introspective world of moral stagnation and ethical ennui, and Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson explored the fringes of American society, the works of Norman Mailer and Michael Herr examine the public sphere of the Sixties experience. More precisely, Mailer and Herr use their own emotions, intuitions, and psyches to explore the moral depths of American public policy. Like their New Journalism counterparts, they remain the central characters in the narrative; however, their differing approach is to test the ethical resilience of public policies by figuring the factor of "humanness" into the equation.

Adopting an autobiographic approach to coverage of the 1967 March on the Pentagon in *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History*, Mailer critiques the escalation of American involvement in the Vietnam War and the moral worth of dissent against those escalation policies. In fact, Mailer was one of the major participants in the March on the Pentagon, and decided only afterward to write about it (at the urging of Willie Morris, former editor of Harper's). Since Mailer was a leading character in the event, his autobiographic perspective is a view from the inside, and his emotions and reactions help delineate the subjective reality of the demonstration. Since Mailer was a leading character in the event.

Mailer employs a third-person autobiographical form first popularized by Henry Adams in The Education of Henry Adams. The main character becomes not "I" but "Mailer." According to Wolfe, this device only works when "the writer takes the trouble to describe and develop his own character with at least as much care as he would devote to any other main character."53 In The Armies of the Night, Mailer succeeds in fully developing the protagonist's emotions and psychic responses—a necessity for being impressionistically evaluate the moral limits of American policies in Vietnam and the ethical value of dissent. Pulling no punches in this exercise in selfexamination. Mailer observes:

Still, Mailer had a complex mind of sorts. Like a later generation which was to burn holes in their brain on Speed, he had given his own head the texture of a fine Swiss cheese. Years ago he had made all sorts of erosions in his intellectual firmament by consuming modestly promiscuous amounts of whiskey, marijuana, seconal, and Benzedrine. It had given him the illusion he was a genius, as indeed an entire generation of children would come to see themselves a decade later out on celestial journeys of LSD.<sup>54</sup>

As the subtitle suggests, Mailer simultaneously serves as novelist and historian, with historical evidence offered in the form of personal observation and participation, and in the "evidence" of emotional and psychic reactions to events in the public sphere of society. Whereas conventional journalistic practice would have focused on the number of protesters arrested on the steps of the Pentagon and the level of force used by the U.S. Marshals to repel them, Mailer takes a "tower" perspective to record the event. Calling upon his own senses, intuitions, and emotions to serve as "telescopes" metaphorically mounted on the tower, Mailer employs novelistic techniques to paint a sweeping canvas of a 32-hour anti-war event. Mailer says this tower technique entails a "secret collaboration" between the Novelist and the Historian, adding:

Of course, the tower is crooked, and the telescopes warped, but the instruments of all sciences—history so much as physics—are always constructed in small or large error; what supports the use of them now is that our intimacy with the

master builder of the tower, and the lens grinder of the telescopes... has given some advantage for correcting the error of the instruments and the imbalance of his tower. May that be claimed of many histories?... For the novel... is, when it is good, the personification of a vision which will enable one to comprehend other visions better; a microscope—if one is exploring the pond; a telescope upon a tower if you are scrutinizing the forest.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Mailer is making a distinction between accuracy and truth; while a conventional news story may be accurate in its surface account of what transpired on the steps of the Pentagon, it likely failed to capture the true sense of what it was like for a protester to get billy-clubbed over the head by a U. S. Marshal, or what it was like for a Marshal to face thousands of protesters intent on entering the Pentagon. Along with a tower perspective of historical events, Mailer also is calling for the necessary reflection it takes to transform raw facts and data into historical moments that yield some sense of meaning and significance. Mailer asserts this can be achieved by employing the novelist's painstaking dedication to detail, nuance, pathos, and irony—an approach conducive to analyzing facts "in the field of light a labor of lens-grinding has produced." 57

Utilizing an autobiographic narrative that also uses a tower perspective of analysis, Mailer comes to the conclusion that dissent is an ethical duty (on the individual level) in the face of what he considers to be immoral governmental policies concerning American involvement in Vietnam. In fact, Mailer views American policies in Southeast Asia as being symptomatic of a far more pervasive disease that is destroying America—a capitalist system that spawns compulsive greed and negates citizen participation in the democratic process:

Brood on that country who expresses our will. She is America, once a beauty of magnificence unparalleled, now a beauty with a leprous skin. She is heavy with child—no one knows if legitimate—and languishes in a dungeon whose walls are never seen. Now the first contractions of her fearsome labor begin—it will go on: No doctor exists to tell the hour. It is only known that false labor is not likely on her now, no, she will probably give birth, and to what?—the most fearsome totalitarianism the world has ever know? Or can she, poor giant, tormented lovely girl, deliver a babe of a new world brave and tender, artful and wild?<sup>58</sup>

Mailer further refines his impressionistic examination of American political policy and the nature of dissent in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. In terms of political policy, Mailer asserts that politics at the national level should be comprehended as "politics-as-property"—so much so that even moral

integrity (or the public impression of such) possessed by a politician is also property, "since it brings power and/or emoluments to him." Mailer adds:

Indeed a very high politician...has no political substance unless he is the servant of ideological institutions or interests and the available moral passions of the electorate, so serving, he is the agent of the political power they bestow on him, which power is certainly a property.<sup>60</sup>

Concerning the nature of dissent, Mailer likens the Chicago demonstrators to soldiers risking life and limb to fight for what they believe in:

They were young men who were not going to Vietnam. So they would show every lover of war in Vietnam that the reason they did not go was not for lack of the courage to fight; no, they would carry the fight over every street in Old Town and the Loop where the opportunity presented itself. If they had been gassed and beaten, their leaders arrested on fake charges... they were going to demonstrate that they would not give up, that they were the stuff out of which the very best soldiers were made.<sup>61</sup>

Again employing a third-person autobiographic style (in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, Mailer refers to himself as "the reporter"), plus the novelist's tower perspective and eye for nuance and detail, Mailer seeks a larger historical truth that could not be obtained through the conventional techniques of reportage.

Meanwhile, Michael Herr's *Dispatches* impressionistically examines the moral depths of American policy in Southeast Asia through the use of autobiography (Herr served as *Esquire*'s Vietnam correspondent in 1967–68) and by chronicling the war from the point of view of the line troops themselves. Herr's narrative, alternatingly gritty and lyrical, captures the feeling of disorientation, which he claims was so much a part of the Vietnam experience. As Herr told Tom Wolfe, "At first I didn't feel like I was covering anything. I just felt very lost." For Herr, Vietnam was a war of misinformation, where body counts were exaggerated, losses were downplayed, and atrocities were covered up. Using both the third and first person, Herr attempts to penetrate the psyches of the men in the rice paddies and the trenches. In so doing, he chronicles in graphic detail what it is like to fight and die for what was widely perceived as a lost cause. Khesanh particularly stands as a symbol of failed American policy in Herr's book:

Something more was working on the young Marine, and the Gunny knew what it was. In this war they called it "acute environmental reaction," but Vietnam spawned a jargon of such delicate locutions that it's often impossible to know even remotely the thing being described. Most Americans would

rather be told their son is undergoing acute environmental reaction than to hear that he is suffering from shell shock, because they could no more deal with the fact of shell shock than they could with the reality of what had happened to this boy during his five months at Khesanh.<sup>63</sup>

Shortly upon his arrival in Vietnam, Herr realized that any conventional attempt at covering the war would be inadequate in an environment where disinformation and dislocation were the watchwords. He also quickly dismissed any notion of the neutral observer impersonally and objectively filing stories about the war. Instead, the moral responsibility of the eyewitness to history weighed heavily upon his shoulders:

Talk about impersonating an identity, about locking into a role, about irony: I went to cover the war and the war covered me; an old story, unless of course you've never heard it. I went there behind the crude but serious belief that you had to be able to look at anything, serious because I acted on it and went, crude because I didn't know, it took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did.<sup>64</sup>

Clearly, Herr is struggling with the same concerns as Didion, Wolfe, Thompson, and Mailer—how best to record the historical events of a decade that was marked by social fragmentation and personal alienation. Like his New Journalism counterparts, Herr experiments with a reporting style that seeks insight into a subjective reality; however, Herr appears more willing to explore the ethical consequences of the reporting process itself.

#### Conclusion

Just as the social and political turmoil of the 1960s prompted many Americans to reevaluate the morality of American domestic and foreign policies, plus the reality and worth of the American Dream, so too did various journalists in the Sixties reexamine the methods used to record societal strife. For journalists like Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, Norman Mailer, and Michael Herr, attempting to record an objective reality in a society where the center no longer was holding seemed futile. In the midst of social fragmentation and increasing personal alienation, the subjective reality emerged as the reporter's meaningful frontier of analysis. The New Journalists dismissed the traditional journalistic practice of the reporter as neutral observer; instead, the reporter often became the central character of the story by personally reacting to the social upheaval being observed. On the surface, the stories stood as one reporter's testimony to disorder and dislocation; however, on closer examination, the reporter serves as a mirror for what is transpiring in the hearts and minds of Americans at large. The New Journalist also tries to accomplish this by writing the narration from the point of view of the characters depicted.

This also deviates from conventional journalistic practice, which strives to avoid figuring out what people think or feel. From the New Journalist's perspective, it is not the event being covered that is of primary importance; it is the ways in which people react emotionally and intellectually that provide the story's true angle.

Unlike conventional reporters, the New Journalists developed the habit of staying with the people they were writing about for days or weeks at a time. They had to gather all the material the conventional journalist was after, but then keep going. It was crucial to the New Journalist to be there when dramatic scenes occurred—to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, the details of the environment. According to Wolfe, the idea was to give the full objective description, "plus something that readers had always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective and emotional life of the character."65 Only by using entire scenes, extended dialogue, the point of view of characters, and interior monologue, could writers like Didion, Wolfe, Thompson, Mailer, and Herr attempt to come to terms with the widening social chasms of the Sixties. Eventually, the New Journalists would be accused of "entering people's minds" in the course of their reporting. While some people scoffed at such a journalistic technique, many New Journalists figured it was "one more doorbell a reporter had to push" to encounter the subjective reality of the Sixites.66

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Michael Schudson's *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978) for an exhaustive examination of the ideology of objectivity in American journalism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In the inverted-pyramid style of newswriting, stories are written with a lead paragraph containing the most important facts, with remaining facts presented in descending order of importance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A term coined by Joan Didion on page 85 of the title essay in her book, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York: Touchstone, 1968).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See page 23 of Tom Wolfe's *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) for the historical origin of this term. This nonfiction also has been labeled as literary journalism, experimental reportage, the new nonfiction, and parajournalism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> *Id*. at 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Gay Talese, Fame and Obscurity (New York: Dell, 1981): 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> *Id*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Wolfe, *supra* note 5, at 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Talese, supra note 7, at 9–10.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfe, supra note 5, at 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> *Id*.

<sup>13</sup> Id. at 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Id.

<sup>15</sup> *Id*.

<sup>48</sup> *Id*.

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<sup>16</sup> Id.
17 Id. at 51.
18 Didion, supra note 3. at xi.
19 Id. at xii.
20 Id. at xiii-xiv.
<sup>21</sup> A term used by David Eason, a Middle Tennessee State University mass
communication professor, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on New Journalism and
has a national reputation for his research in this area.
<sup>22</sup> Id.
<sup>23</sup> Didion, supra note 3, at xii.
<sup>24</sup> Id. at 84.
25 Id. at 98.
<sup>26</sup> Id. at 145.
<sup>27</sup> Id. at 146.
28 Id. at 144.
<sup>29</sup> Joan Didion, The White Album (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979): 11-13.
<sup>31</sup> Didion interviewed Kasabian in 1970 at the Sybil Brand Institute for Women in Los
Angeles. On pages 42-44 of The White Album, Didion describes her dread at entering the
prison, and how the interviews with Kasabian proved to be a haunting experience: "This
particular juxtaposition of the spoken and the unspeakable was eerie and unsettling, and
made my notebook a litany of little ironies so obvious as to be of interest only to
dedicated absurdists. An example: Linda dreamed of opening combination restaurant-
boutique and pet shop."
32 Id. at 47.
<sup>33</sup> Tom Wolfe, The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (New York: Farrar,
Straus & Giroux, 1965): xv.
<sup>34</sup> Id.
35 ld. at xvi–xvii.
<sup>36</sup> In The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby, see, respectively, "The Last
American Hero": "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't Hear You! Too Noisy) Las
Vegas!!!"; "The Marvelous Mouth"; "The New Art Gallery Society"; and "The Saturday
Route."
<sup>37</sup> Id. at xix.
38 Id. at xviii.
<sup>39</sup> Id. at 13.
<sup>40</sup> Id. at 18.
<sup>41</sup> See pages 351-52 of Douglas A. Anderson and Bruce D. Itule's Contemporary News
Reporting (New York: Random House, 1984), for a discussion of the Code of Ethics
designed by the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, in particular the
section dealing with accuracy and objectivity. According to the code, "sound practice
makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion."
<sup>42</sup> Wolfe, supra note 33, at 77.
<sup>43</sup> Tom Wolfe, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (New York: Bantam, 1968): 256-272.
44 Wolfe, supra note 5, at 204.
45 Wolfe, supra note 43, at 256.
46 Wolfe, supra note 5, at 172.
<sup>47</sup> Id.
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Hunter S. Thompson, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream (New York: Warner Books, 1971): 4. 50 Id. at 89.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfe, supra note 5, at 188.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> *Id*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Id. at 189.

<sup>54</sup> Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History (New York: Signet, 1968): 15. 55 *Id.* at 245.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> *Id*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 245–46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 320.

<sup>59</sup> Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968 (New York: Signet, 1968): 106.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> *Id*. at 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Wolfe, *supra* note 5, at 85.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1978): 91.

<sup>64</sup> Id. at 20.

<sup>65</sup> Wolfe, supra note 5, at 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Id.

# When Fiction Becomes Reality: Authorial Voice in *The Door in the Floor*, Secret Window, and Swimming Pool

The intimate connection between authors and their works has always captivated readers. Where is the line between an artist and his or her creation? Are there times when the line is invisible, when the real and the imaginative become one? This paper deals with the role of the imagination in storytelling, with the distinctions between genius and madness in the creative process, and with meta-fiction, or the way in which literary and visual texts about language and images comment upon themselves.

With varying degrees of success, three recent films—two of which are drawn from literature—address the complexities of the authorial process and form the basis for several conclusions about storytelling as a stay against chaos. While creating characters and plots, novelists and screenwriters are also authors of their own experiences and are often extraordinarily conscious of how the narratives they create mimic the narratives they live. This study addresses the self-consciousness of three fictional authors as they weave experience into art.

The Door in the Floor (2004), Secret Window (2004), and Swimming Pool (2003) feature protagonists who have lost their way and who hope fiction will save them. Ted Cole (Jeff Bridges) considers himself "an entertainer of children," although his book The Door in the Floor is an exploration of the horrors that lie beneath us as we move unsuspectingly through life. Reviewer Arthur Lazere writes:

The title of the film is also the title of one of Ted's books and it's a variation on one of the classic, central themes of children's literature—the frightening unknowns hiding somewhere nearby, whether under a door in the floor or in [Stephen] Sondheim's *Woods* or down Alice's rabbit hole. Children, the innocents, must venture out into life with all its risky experiences, including hurts and losses and disappointments and the mysteries of sexuality, too.

In *The Secret Window*, an accomplished writer, Morton Rainey (Johnny Depp), is accused of having plagiarized one of his stories, "Sowing Season"; as he tries to unravel the mystery of authorship (and simultaneously regain control of his life), he goes slowly mad. Finally, in *Swimming Pool*, Sarah Morton (Charlotte Rampling) is struggling to produce a manuscript different from the mystery novel series that has earned her the respect of her publisher and her readers. Hoping to impress her publisher, she leaves London and isolates herself at his home in the Provencal town of Luberon and, through an interplay of narratives

(a diary, an unpublished manuscript, and her own text-in-progress), finds her way both into a new genre and back to herself. She succeeds by creating a narrative in which, as reviewer Michael Rechtshaffen writes, the "line between reality and fantasy becomes increasingly smudged"; in fact, the line between her own life and the lives of her characters is blurred as well.

Drawn from a 1998 novel by John Irving entitled A Widow for One Year, The Door in the Floor deals with Ted and Marion Cole (Kim Basinger), who are dismantling their marriage after losing both their sons in a car accident five years before. A.O. Scott argues in the New York Times (July 14, 2004) that The Door in the Floor "may even belong in the rarefied company of movies that are better than the books on which they are based." (Two other Irving novels became successful films: The World According to Garp [1983] and The Cider House Rules [1999].) Separated and trading residences in East Hampton in order to be available to their four-year-old daughter Ruth (Elle Fanning), the Coles employ storytelling as a way to make meaning out of their shattered lives and as a way to keep the memory of their sons Thomas and Timothy alive. (In the novel, Marion Cole is also a writer, and Ruth later becomes one.)

A bright and articulate child, Ruth has become a receptacle for her parents' stories, and she obsessively tells and retells the stories of her brothers to those who will listen and demands that her parents chronicle the events captured in the family photographs that adorn the house. Scott writes, "Rather than help her parents move beyond their grief she traps them inside it, and herself as well." Some of the most powerful moments in the film are of Ruth as she stands on a chair in a darkened hallway, looking at the framed photographs of young men who died before she was born and whispering their stories to herself. Becoming anxious if the photographs are moved or taken down, Ruth seems to realize that possessing the images and their respective narratives is a way to hold onto her dissolving family.

The photographs that decorate the hallways and bedrooms in the film are decontextualized by the child as she struggles to understand what happened to her brothers. Thomas and Timothy seem alive and energized in the photographs, but they are absent in real life and real time. The contrast terrifies Ruth, making her cry out on more than one occasion and ask if she, too, is going to die. (Ruth, for example, drops one of the framed photographs and cuts her finger. As the doctor puts stitches in, she asks, "Am I going to die?" The answer, of course, is "No": The wound will heal. But the answer is also "Yes": Like her brothers, she, too, will one day die.)

Overhearing one conversation between Ted Cole and Ruth, we learn how the boundaries between life and death have become confused for the child. We recognize the photographs and literature as her way to preserve the past. Ruth asks her father about her brothers in an effort to understand where they have gone:

RUTH: 'Dead' means they're broken?
TED: Well, their bodies are broken. Yes.

RUTH: And they're under the ground?

TED: Their bodies are. Yes. RUTH: Tell me what 'dead' is.

TED: When you look at the photographs of Thomas and

Timothy, do you remember the stories of what

they're doing?

RUTH: Yes.

TED: Well, Tom and Timmy are alive in your imagination.

Then, into the triangle of Ted, Marion, and Ruth Cole steps Eddie O'Hare (Jon Foster), a junior at Philips Exeter Academy. Like the central figure in coming-of-age films such as *Sophie's Choice*, O'Hare will most assuredly learn more from living with the Coles than he will from his job, correcting the punctuation in Ted Cole's newest story, "A Sound Like Someone Trying Not To Make a Sound." O'Hare's father, an English professor who remembers Thomas and Timothy Cole from their time at Exeter, wants his son to work as Ted Cole's apprentice, although ultimately O'Hare spends more time as Cole's driver (Cole had lost his license three months before for driving while drunk) than he does learning the craft of writing. The 16-year-old, who was hired by Ted Cole to spend the summer as his assistant, falls in love immediately with the sad, sensitive, maternal, perceptive, withholding Marion Cole, who picks him up at the ferry. He becomes their messenger and translator; rarely do Ted and Marion Cole appear together in a scene, and O'Hare often serves as a conduit for information.

While Marion Cole temporarily escapes the memory of her sons' violent death—one son's leg was severed at the hip, and she picks up his shoe from the wreckage without realizing the shoe is attached to his leg—her husband finds refuge from her inability to engage with him and refuge from his own grief by drawing and subsequently seducing women in the community. As Irving explains in his novel, the models go through several stages—innocence, modesty, degradation, and shame—that precede Ted Cole's ultimate and inevitable abandonment of the women.

At the heart of the film is Ted Cole's children's tale *The Door in the Floor*, which is illustrated with grotesque figures drawn with the ink from squids. "And in the cabin there was a door in the floor," begins the harrowing tale. "Children had come to visit for Christmas but had opened the door and had disappeared down the hole." When a pregnant woman looks into the door in the floor, we learn that she has "seen some things—things so horrible you can't imagine them." Expecting a son, the woman fears that he will one day open the door in the floor. She resolves her dilemma by vowing to tell him never to open it. The boy, however, listening from the womb, "didn't know if he wanted to be born into a world in which there was a door in the floor."

The "door in the floor," of course, is richly suggestive: It is the death of two brothers in a car accident while they are joyously looking forward to a ski vacation; it is Ted, a deeply sad man having sex with a series of wounded

women; it is the underside of a marriage going through its death throes; it is the lost innocence of Eddie O'Hare, who falls in love with and is abandoned by Marion; it is a child deserted emotionally (and later physically) by her mother; and it is also the power of fiction to unleash itself on unwary readers who have forgotten how treacherous is the world in which we live and how fragile and temporary is this life.

Part of the difficulty of engaging the role of the writer on an intellectual level in The Door in the Floor is that Ted Cole is not a sympathetic figure on an emotional level. We remain detached from him throughout much of his story. Ted Cole is "in many ways, monstrous, using his charm and talent the way he uses sex and drink, as a defense against both intimacy and guilt." Scott suggests. Although Ted Cole has admitted to delivering Eddie to his wife because he looks so much like his son Thomas, he is brutal with his young assistant. He critiques the story Eddie brought with him at the first of the summer, telling him that "it isn't really a story." He calls the boy's first effort "an emotional outburst" and a "collection of personal anecdotes that don't really add up to much." Arguing that writing involves "a certain manipulation," Ted Cole tells O'Hare that "everything in fiction is a tool—pain, betrayal, even death. These are like different colors on a painter's palette and you need to use them." Telling O'Hare to describe specific smells and tastes and to use details that "create whole scenes in a reader's mind," Ted Cole argues that fiction should prepare readers for the ending but then surprise them. Later in the film, O'Hare dares to tell Ted Cole that his wife has left him and that he can't imagine she would go to New York. Cole replies, "You don't have an imagination, Eddie."

The limited role of critics is addressed when Ted Cole meets a student at a book signing and learns that she wrote her freshman English term paper on *The Door in the Floor*. Flirting with her, Ted Cole asks her the title of her paper, and she replies, "An Analysis of the Atavistic Symbols of Fear in *The Door in the Floor*." She tells him that myths and fairy tales are "full of images like magic doors and children disappearing and people being so frightened their hair turns white overnight." She tells him that for the unborn child, the door in the floor could even be the vagina. Ted Cole, hiding his amusement, asks her how long the paper was. The young woman tells him it was 28 pages, not counting the bibliography.

This scene is a reminder of the way in which we separate ourselves from fiction through criticism, when we have missed the point of the literature itself because we are emotionally incapable of engaging it. Rather than analyzing "symbols of fear" in the narrative, we should account for our own fear of pain, betrayal, and, of course, mortality. Doing so would not require 28 pages, but it would be a more honest response to the unsettling quality of fiction.

O'Hare's moment of epiphany comes not as he edits Ted Cole's prose or as he sleeps with Marion Cole. Instead, it occurs as he stands beside Ruth at a frame shop and demands the return of a broken photograph that was to be repaired but is overdue. When the shop owner (Donna Murphy) asks him to calm down and write out his complaint, O'Hare writes: "I have been sleeping with Mrs. Cole this summer. I estimate we have made love 60 times. Ted Cole has been (sleeping with Mrs. Vaughn)." Amazed, the shop owner says, "The Vaughns of Gin Lane?... Please go on." O'Hare obliges her and writes: "Marion is taking the pictures with her, every one of them, except the one you have here in the shop. When Ruth goes home, both her mother and all the pictures will be gone. Her dead brothers and her mother will be gone." After delivering the photograph to O'Hare, the woman asks him, "Is Marion leaving you, too?" (Earlier in the day, O'Hare told Marion Cole that he loved her. She replied, "So long, Eddie." Her response is without malice, but also without empathy.) O'Hare must confront his own irretrievable loss and acknowledge his own broken heart. He is not a character in the Coles' story: He is deeply wounded and will never again be the boy he was when he stepped off the ferry.

Ruth has an even more unsettling discovery to make as she gazes at the picture hooks that pepper her house: "Where are all the other pictures?" Ruth asks O'Hare. "Why would Mommy do that?" Ted Cole's questions mirror his daughter's: "What kind of mother doesn't even try to get custody of her daughter?" and later, "What kind of mother leaves her daughter?" he asks.

The climax of the film *The Door in the Floor*, written and directed by Tod Williams, occurs when Ted Cole enters O'Hare's room on his last night in the Cole house. Startled, O'Hare turns on the lamp beside his bed. Cole says, quietly, "Turn off the light, Eddie. This story's better in the dark." Cole then tells O'Hare about his sons, 17 and 15, who were sitting in the front seat of the family car with Cole and his wife in the back. Caught in a snowstorm and preparing to turn left, the family's car is cut in half by a snowplow: The driver couldn't see them in the "wet, thick snow" that blanketed the rear window and tail lights. Thomas was killed by the steering column; Timothy bled to death in the ambulance. Remembering how his wife reached for Timothy's shoe on the floorboard of the car, Cole said, "I couldn't move. I couldn't even speak." As he leaves the room, Cole tells O'Hare: "And that is the end of the story."

And that is the end of the story. The story marks the end of a marriage; the end of Marion Cole's ability to function in the world around her; the end of Eddie O'Hare's innocence; the end of any possibility that the Coles would be able to parent Ruth, the child they would have in their one last, vain attempt to save themselves; and the end of The Door in the Floor, in which the boy not yet born will most assuredly open the door and see the horrors that turned his mother's hair white. It is also the end of the film, as the camera moves from the empty, pictureless hallway to the new gardener helping Ruth trim a hedge to Ted playing squash by himself before opening a door in the floor of the court and lowering himself into it. But the death of the two boys and our participation in the narrative is not the end of our story. The film has manipulated us, surprised us, as Ted Cole would say, but our lives are another narrative entirely, and we have our own photographs and our own endings.

In Secret Window, written by David Koepp, it is, again, both a marriage and a mind that unravel. Taken from a short story by Stephen King entitled "Secret Window, Secret Garden," the film opens with Mort Rainey (Depp) leaving a motel in which his wife Amy Rainey (Maria Bello) and Ted Milner (Timothy Hutton) are making love. As the wipers thump across the windshield and snow falls, Rainey argues with himself: "Don't go back. Do not go back there." The cacophony of voices begins, but we do not yet understand its significance. We learn later that Rainey's voices are evidence of separate identities that are beginning to manifest themselves as he goes slowly and privately insane. He ignores his own warning, takes a key from the front desk, enters the couple's room, points a gun at them, screams, and leaves.

Six months later Rainey is sitting in his cabin on the coast of New York. He is accosted by a man who introduces himself as John Shooter (John Turturro) and is accused of having stolen his story: "When two writers show up at the same story, it's all about who wrote the words first," Shooter says. "Wouldn't you say that's true?" This statement is, of course, as compelling as the way in which stories—however disconcerting—give a frame to our existence. In Shooter's statement lies an acknowledgement that no story is uniquely ours, although its expression might be. Shooter tells Rainey he wrote the story seven years before and asks, "How in the hell did a big money scribbling asshole like you get down to a little shit-splat town in Mississippi and steal my goddam story?"

Before the viewer learns the answer, Rainey's dog Chico will be killed; the home he shared with Amy in Riverdale, N.Y., will burn down; and a detective and townsperson will be killed. As Amy (and the viewer) understand for the first time the extent of Rainey's madness, the word "Shooter" ("Shoot Her") becomes clear moments before she and her lover are killed. It is John Shooter who demands that Mort Rainey "fix the story." To "fix" the story, Amy and Ted must die. The end of the story reads: "I know I can do it, [he] said, helping himself to another ear of corn from the steaming bowl. I'm sure that in time her death will be a mystery, even to me."

As in Swimming Pool, mirrors are used in Secret Window to suggest the differences between real life and fiction, between sanity and madness. Characters tell Rainey, "I don't think you're really all that well" and "You really don't look well at all." But Rainey continues his dialogue with himself, even when Shooter tells him that if he's wrong about the author of his story, he'll turn himself over to authorities: "Then I'd turn myself in. But I'd take care of myself before a trial, Mr. Rainey, because if things turn out that way then I suppose I am crazy. And that kind of crazy man has no reason or excuse to live."

The relationship between authors and their characters is hinted at when the voices take over Mort Rainey's mind. One voice says, "There is no John Shooter. There never has been. You invented him." Rainey yells back: "Leave me alone!" The voice says, "You are alone." Wearing John Shooter's 10-gallon hat, Rainey gazes at himself in the mirror and asks, "What is happening to me?"

To save himself, Rainey tells Shooter, "You don't exist." Shooter answers: "I exist, Mr. Rainey. I exist because you made me. You thought me up. Gave me my name. Told me everything you wanted me to do. I did them things so you wouldn't have to."

Writers create characters who do "them things" so they don't have to. They live vicariously through their creations and allow their readers to do so as well. Where an author takes us may or may not be where we want to go. Like the unborn boy in *The Door in the Floor*, do we really want to be born into a world in which there is a door in the floor? Do we really want literature to take us there?

In Swimming Pool, mystery writer Sarah Morton and the object of her invention, Julie (Ludivine Sagnier), weave a tale that suggests a more hopeful role for the imagination. Although Julie's murder of Franck (Jean-Marie Lamour) must occur in order to help Morton develop a riveting story, the murder is not "real," and Morton can return to London and to her publisher with a published copy of a very different kind of book than she had written before.

Directed by Francois Ozon, Swimming Pool suggests that whatever happens in literature is more alive than what happens in life, although that the joy of creation dwarfs other human pleasures. Morton, a tight, controlled, unhappy, bored woman who drinks whiskey in the morning and eats yogurt during the day, creates Julie, an unrestrained, loud, disrespectful, voluptuous young woman with full breasts and an insatiable appetite for sex with several undeserving partners. By that action of creation, Morton sets herself free, personally and professionally.

The swimming pool is as transparent as the characters are hidden. Throughout the film, we see Morton in a series of mirrors that offer multiple, identical images. We watch Morton as she writes about her participation in her own story. The mirror (and Morton's story) offer infinite reflections and infinite narrative possibilities. Referring to her publisher John Bosload (Charles Dance), Morton tells Julie, "When someone keeps an entire part of their lives secret from you, it's fascinating and frightening." Using Julie's diary, which she steals from her backpack; a manuscript allegedly written by Julie's late mother; and her own text, Morton creates Julie, and the young woman sacrifices herself to give Morton a provocative murder mystery and a "love story with a happy ending."

The relationship between Morton and Julie deepens, until Julie, wracked with despair over the murder of Franck, throws herself at Morton, calling her "mother," which, of course, she is, since Julie is Morton's fictional creation. Fearing that Morton had left and "abandoned" her, Julie is reassured by Morton's affection for her and wants Morton to be absolved of her role in covering up Franck's death:

JULIE: Sarah, there's something you forgot to burn.

MORTON: What's that?

JULIE: Your book. It could be used as evidence.

MORTON: Did you read it?

JULIE: No, but I just can imagine.

MORTON: Well, stop imagining. Get yourself to bed.

We have work to do tomorrow.

When we learn that Julie exists (John has a daughter named Julie) but that the Julie of the film is an imaginary person, we understand how much more immediate and real a fictional character can be than the actual, public one. We also hear in Morton's words (Well, stop imagining) the authority of the writer as she takes back the story from her formidable character. That authority is reinforced when Julie tells Morton, I've come to say goodbye, and Morton replies, It's possibly for the best. In the final scene with Julie, we watch part of the action through a mirror. Julie gives Morton her mother's novel, saying, Perhaps if I give you these pages today you will bring her back to life. So if they inspire you, take them—steal them—they're yours.

When Bosload reads and rejects Morton's manuscript (Where's the action? Where are the plot twists?), Morton tells him, I think this is the finest piece of work I've done in a bloody long time. She then shows him the manuscript in book form, revealing that she secretly published the narrative he rejected. He asks. Why couldn't you have told me? She responds by saying, There were a few things you couldn't tell me. She tells him to give the signed copy to his daughter, whom she sees for the first time as she leaves his office.

The film ends with Morton watching Julie swim. As she comes out of the pool, Morton waves. The Julie of her novel (and her very real interior life) is replaced momentarily by the newly available image of Bosload's real daughter, then superseded by the fictional one. Morton's expression suggests a genuine affection for her creation, her child.

The role of narrative as a shaper of meaning is reinforced in all three films. As Ruth looks at the empty hallway of her house and remembers the stories of her largely absent family—associating those stories with photographs that no longer hang on the walls—the role of storytelling and memory as frames of human experience become clear. In Secret Window, Mort Rainey is driven mad by the secrets that lie beneath his own door in the floor. He loses his mind (and his wife) at the same time that he loses his ability to write and to coherently frame his experience; although he considers the end of the story John Shooter wrote perfect, it is instead an indicator of madness, not genius. Staring at the screen of his laptop and eating the corn that grew in the garden where his wife is buried. Rainey can no longer write the short stories that gave him a reason for being. There is no superintending narrative, no frame, no order.

It is Sarah Morton of Swimming Pool who endures and prevails, rediscovering her muse and creating a novel that gains her more recognition than the formulaic mysteries for which she had become known. Morton lives her story, inventing characters to whom she becomes attached. In doing so, she connects fiction and real life, making sense of the latter. Ozon is masterful in reminding the viewer that Morton's dreaming and writing are the connecting threads linking the imaginary with the real; in one particularly effective scene,

Morton sits in a chair at the bottom left-hand corner of the screen: The camera moves slowly toward her, eclipsing Julie and Franck as they dance in the upper right-hand portion of the frame. Her characters invite her into their story, but she reappropriates the narrative before going upstairs to sleep and to dream. Unlike Ted Cole and Mort Rainey, Morton enjoys her revitalized literary success and finds solace and purpose in her novel Swimming Pool.

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## Man(kind) VS. Mountain

"Now dear, summer'll be coming along soon. What'll it be: the beach or the mountains? Tan and dive into the breakers or camp and hike on the trails?" Who hasn't met that challenge, with no losers? My point is: a mere two hundred or so years past, there wouldn't have been a decision to make. Water, preferably the ocean beaches, was the only choice. Long, long ago mankind made some sort of peace, however uneasy, with the open waters, despite typhoons, the rare tsunami or maelstrom, hurricanes, and all manner of mere storms. Almost nobody considered mountains as anything but bleak, uninviting, even dangerous obstacles to human movement. There's been an obvious sea change, worth a generous look.

For starters, we can posit two ways of regarding mountains—what they really are against what they mean to us. In dictionary words, mountains are minor rugosities on the almost spheroid we call earth. They are also receptors of snow and rain that feed the rivers that fertilize the crops, absent which, save for fish, we would all starve. What is miraculously more, they separate languages, indeed whole cultures. Consider the Pyrenees and the differences between French culture and that of Spain, or the Alps that sever northern from southern Europe. Closer to home, think of the massive Rockies and the Sierras as barriers against the growth of the United States. Finally, look at how the fastnesses of the Appalachians can separate the however miscalled "hillbillies" from the coastal and Midwestern peoples, linguistically and culturally. Before technology allowed us to blast roads out of the rocks or tunnel through them, or fly over them, mountains deeply affected the course of civilization.

All this speaks to what mountains are or do, not how humanity reacts to them, a story far more complex, "Mountains of the Mind," as Robert Macfarlane so aptly calls them in his book of the same title.

In civilization's dawn age, quite universally then, mountains, like rivers, trees, the wind, were viewed animistically as live, sentient realities that must be worshipped or placated lest they bring harm on bemused, fearful humanity. Consider, for instance, creation myths, basically all animistic. Among the Hawaiian island people, Kauai was the early home of Pele, goddess of volcanoes, who could shake the land, move the waves, explode the mountains' fire, and help evolve the landscape itself, with its canyons and precipitous cliffs. Molten lava was truly alive. Many a mountain, the world over, was considered sacred. Besides Pele's lava-bearers, besides Olympos and Parnassos, think Navajo Mountain bordering Arizona and Utah, or the Himalayan Mt. Everest.

In any event, mountains were no playground. If Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, it was not for exercise or enjoyment. The "high mountain" that Isaiah bids us to climb is spiritual not physical (x 1.9). There is a fine passage in Virgil's *Aeneid* (XII 684–89) describing a

mountain boulder that plunges headlong from a lofty crag, uprooted by the wind, either undermined by swirling flood or passing years—a relentless mass rushing furiously downward and bounding over the earth, taking in its path forests, herds, and men.

Here surely at last we must have evidence of a description of a real mountain and a real disaster, impressively described, something Virgil himself must actually have experienced. The problem is that the passage was lifted almost verbatim from the *Iliad* (XIII 136–41), a description already known to classical audiences. I find no scholar claiming the elusive Homer as a mountaineer. Both Greek and Roman poet would seem to be indulging in literary tropes, however realistic.

On a more positive note, we have Hadrian's famous ascent of Mount Etna, ca. 120 A.D. (even then an impressive 9000 ft. high). The emperor spent a night on top, awoke the next morn to a fine view, noting that from the ice and snow at his feet he could see clear to Africa; a rainbow spanning the horizon was a bonus. But Hadrian was scarcely of his time, the first modern man, as historians like to acclaim him (Yourcenar 163, 182–83).

History affords but few other similar stories of pleasant encounters between men and mountains. To ancients and medieval mankind alike, mountains appeared hostile, inhospitable, cold, alien, disturbing. Things do not grow well on the heights, other than trees and the occasional tiny alpine flowers, and even those not much above snow line. Chary of oxygen, mountains support little human life. This lack of companionship may remain the most serious charge leveled against the forbidding peaks. To be sure, the seas are equally lonely, but we need them as a source of food and easy travel. No sailboat can carry us over the mountains.

Praise for the heights is almost lacking. If Horace could write encomia about his lovely Sabine farm fronting the gentle Apennines, he wrote no lines of admiration for the snowy Dolomites to the north (Duff 540; Horace). The ancients doubtless endorsed Socrates's cryptic observation, "If you see one mountain, sea, or river, [you] see [them] all." The Athenian sage probably was simply referring to his belief in the oneness of nature, but it suggests no great interest in any kind of outer nature on the part of this city dweller.

Here and there is the rare mention of mountains (I mean substantive references), but nothing to match the formidable array of sea novels, stories, and poetry from *The Odyssey* to *Moby Dick*, not even more modest offerings like Mark Twain's descriptions of his beloved Mississippi in *Huckleberry Finn*.

Besides Hadrian, I have come on no other climbers until around 1280 A.D., when King Peter of Aragon is recorded climbing Mt. Canigou (9138 ft.) in the Spanish Pyrenees. Would that he had not claimed to have seen dragons en route, thus giving the whole excursion a Mandevillean ring (Irving 7–8).

The next outstanding name comparable to Hadrian's is that exemplary early Renaissance figure, Francesco Petrarca, the great poet-humanist, another

"first modern man." His famous climb of Mt. Ventoux in southern France in the year 1336 has been told and retold (Petrarch 11–19; Marías 190).<sup>2</sup>

I must at this point add one more name, that of another famous writer somewhat out of synch with his age, Michel de Montaigne. Late in the sixteenth century he made a long, arduous journey from his Bordeaux home across the Alps to Rome, visiting many a hot spring en route to treat his gallstones (the real reason for his trip). Though lacking a picturesque descriptive language (European vernaculars of the day were simply inadequate), he describes rushing waters, unusual plants and animals, all sharply and appreciatively delineated. "The mountains, infinitely pleasing," he called them (Singer).

Now Montaigne, like any good sixteenth-century Frenchman, appreciated nature modified by mankind over the wilder reaches of the mountains. The remarkable thing, however, is that he could appreciate both. The only others sympathetic to the mountains at that time would be the likes of Conrad Gesner or Benoît Marti of Bern, both Swiss, living their lives amidst the heights.<sup>3</sup>

In any event, more typical of his day would be the reaction to mountains of the French poet Joachim du Bellay (1522–1560). He had to traverse the Grisons to reach Rome one cold winter. Sonnet 134 of his *Regrets* sequence tells his story. He recounts heinous crimes such as matricide, patricide, treason, and blasphemy, worthy of the most awful punishment. Having to traverse the Grisons is punishment enough, he decides. Let's give Du Bellay a sense of humor, but he remains no partisan of the high wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

Little change occurred in the seventeenth century. If Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* part 1 (late in the century) gives us the line, "They came to the Delectable Mountains," it is a nonexistent, allegorical range never seen by the English author or anyone else.

Let me inject a curious little sidebar to our story. The following folktale goes way back, but seemingly was quite perdurable. There were no signs warning travelers not to approach the heights of Mont Pilatus, a modest peak of 6995 ft. near Geneva. It looks quite innocent today, with a railway and a walking path up it and a hotel (so European) on top. The natives already knew better. After all, it was named after its infamous tenant Pontius Pilate, who would seize any rash intruder, whence he would summarily wind up in hell. Note that this curious legend is not strictly religious. Religion has indeed strayed across the border into matters societal. The myth did not locate Pilate on some remote island or give him an address in an unsavory ghetto in overcrowded Paris or Rome. It was not their purse monies at stake but their immortal soul, which they would deservedly lose poking around in areas unfit for mankind. End of sidebar (Irving, *Romance* 12).

Jean-Jacques (1712-78) usually gets the major credit for a revolutionary new outlook, though he was simply the most visible example of forerunners in a vast outpouring of anti-classical feeling, a cry for individuality, for the importance of passion, for casting aside restraints, in short, the Age of

Romanticism in all its glories (and excesses) that was soon to engulf Europe, England, and most of the Americas.<sup>5</sup> Mountains were an important, if not the only, vehicle to carry the movement.

Philosophical arguments at times injected actual arguments into mankind's view of mountains. There was the medieval concept of God's flat earth, on which He later elevated mountains as a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin, a theory later adopted by Martin Luther (Nicolson 100–04: Dictionary of the History of Ideas). There was the eighteenth-century dilemma over seashells found in the Alps—did they disprove God's giving us a ready-made world, allowing for evolution of some kind, the rising of the seas at least.<sup>6</sup> But the movement that most strongly affected our opinion of mountains must be Transcendentalism, which argued among other things that sublime scenic environments (e.g., the mountains of New England) were good for man's soul (Babson). The Hudson River School of painters, with their majestic mountain landscapes—in particular, the later western canvasses of Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) and Thomas Moran (1837-1926)—would seem apt illustrations of their claim. The whole business of the effect of special places on the human soul connects with such concepts, for instance, commonly expressed in book or cinema westerns, as writers or directors hinting that awe-inspiring scenery (unsullied, pristine-pure, snow-capped mountains, let us say) influences its inhabitants and somehow ennobles them. I could point to the recent controversial homosexual western, Brokeback Mountain (2005), which quite clearly identified the beautiful mountain scenery with the purity of the relationship between the two cowboys. The problems for each occurred in city settings.

Well, lets fast forward, past the Lake District poets (trampers and scramblers), to the likes of Coleridge and Wordsworth. They developed real mountain fever. If their poetry could, however ably, describe their emotions before such beauty, they still must experience the true thrill of climbing. Wordsworth was born amidst mountains and was cautious of their treacherous moods, but city-dweller Coleridge came to master them, almost recklessly fearless. He did the Scafell Chimney, then a genuine mountaineering feat; and Wordsworth, moving beyond the Lake District, ascended England's highest, Mt. Snowdon (3560 ft.). The first real Age of Mountaineering was about to begin (Irving, Mt. Way, 151–52, 595–98; Spectorsky: 458–59).

Still in the forefront, the English soon took over Switzerland (tourism and mountaineering both). The Playground of Europe (1871), by Leslie Stephen of Dictionary of National Biography fame, was the bestseller that truly opened the floodgates. Tourist and climber alike flocked to the Alps. The vacation cliché—the mountains or the seashore?—was for the first time, at least for Englishmen, a reality.

The phenomenon soon spread. Pope Pius XI in the Alps, Edward Whymper there and in the Andes; A. F. Mummery in the Caucasus; Douglas Freshfield, the Duke of the Abruzzi, and their many followers in the Himalayas.

Americans, with the special cis-Atlantic twist they gave their exploits, rivaled the British: Archdeacon Hudson Stuck conquering Alaska's formidable Mt. McKinley (20,500 ft.), Thoreau on the craggy rocks of Katahdin, Clarence King in the Sierra Nevadas, and John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, from Yosemite to Alaska. These few iconic figures among hundreds of climbers, countless numbers of weekend viewers.

The United States not only furnished numerous examples; it bade well even to surpass the British in appreciating mountains. Here was created Yellowstone, the first national park in 1872, one short year after Stephens's bestseller, soon to be followed, one by one, with a baker's dozen of new reserves—Yosemite, Rainier, Glacier, Rocky Mountain, Cascades, Lassen, etc.—overwhelmingly devoted to preserving unique mountainous areas. As Thoreau put it, "In wildness is the preservation of the world" ("Walking").

The final stage, growing stronger and stronger as the twentieth-century spun out its years, was, for all intents and purposes, purely secular. Mountains now exist to be visited and climbed by the tourists (the less lofty or difficult examples), the unconquered few to be attacked by solo climbers all the way up to large expeditions with leaders, porters, and endless paraphernalia.

There is actually something more going on than simple exaltation in achieving a climb, under pleasant circumstances (friendly companions, food to be appreciated by the cold and weary, the cozy bivouac, dangerous pitches successfully ascended, with the added bonus of incomparably beautiful surroundings [remember, the public now appreciates mountain beauty]).

There is competition, challenge, getting higher, faster, more dangerously—"danger" being the operative word—the extreme sport phenomenon. Cf. a recent movie, *Vertical Limit*: The athlete (no longer a mere amateur scrambler or climber) assuages his ego, displays his machismo by taking extreme, life-threatening, soul-wrenching chances. Somehow just surviving proves the better person.

This stretching of the envelope is more than a desire to excel, even to conquer the unconquerable. It may be exemplified by contrasting George Mallory's three attempts in the 1920s to get to the top of Mt. Everest. No one tried harder; indeed, he and his fellow climber, Andrew Irvine, lost their lives on the highest pitches. But he was a poetic dreamer, an English teacher and idealist, no professional or semi-professional mountaineer. Once asked why climbing Everest was such an obsession with him, he famously replied, "Because it is there," a subtle answer open to more than one interpretation (Unsworth 100). Contrast his answer with that of Sir Edmund Hillary, the New Zealand beekeeper who, with the Nepalese sherpa Tensing Norgay, finally reached the top thirty years later (1953): "We knocked the bastard off!" (Unsworth 337) He's facing an animistic mountain antagonist actively trying to thwart him. This is an assault, no longer just a climb.

Obviously this phenomenon does not exhibit itself in mountaineering alone. It is part of a tougher view of life itself, in keeping with the growing

frequency and intensity of violence in our whole society. As I have argued elsewhere we are still part of the Romantic Age, the very one that gave mountains their favorable press two hundred and fifty years ago ("Of Cinema Violence"). Romantics worship force (Victor Hugo, the veritable prototype of the Romantic, penned the memorable line voiced by the hero of his play *Hernani*, "Je suis une force qui va!"—"I am an active force!"), and the casting off of all restraints.

If mankind early on made a pact with the presence of water, as I have claimed, long ago solidly sealed and delivered, an equally basic peace seems finally to have been delivered with mountains. Our love for their beauteous charms, "the beginning and end of all natural scenery," the post-Romantic Ruskin was to call them, may come from Romanticism, with all its excesses and aspects of violence, but it does exist, and as a true revolution it has almost completely obliterated the long-standing aversion and fear that for centuries preceded it.

The time is the present. Of our fifty united states virtually every one features, somewhere, a mountain or two, big or small, perhaps an extended or pervasive range. Having a picturesque prominence in the background of one's home actually increases property values. The average citizen much enjoys the view, may very well go hiking on a mountain trail, drive up to the top of this or that peak, even locate his castle high upon a mountain crest. There is no sense of dread or alienation. It simply feels natural to enjoy such examples of nature's bounty. We have reached a sense of oneness, a true acceptance of mountain environment.<sup>7</sup>

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#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The observation is reported in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Marias sneers that Petrarch "... ascends a mountain in order to contemplate on the summit, but once there he does not know enough to look around, and instead reads St. Augustine." Some scholars have even argued that the climb was allegorical, not real. As a longtime scrambler, I can attest that Petrarch's account of his pains and struggles to reach the summit ring true.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Italian Renaissance painters depict mountainous backgrounds, but only Leonardo da Vinci shows any real mountain experience. Cf. his "Storm over the Mountain," sketched during an actual visit to the Alps. See "Geology/Landscapes."

Havelock Ellis notes that untenanted nature is "essentially foreign to the socially-minded French" (80–81). Symonds comments on "... the aversion which a Florentine or Roman felt for the inhospitable wilderness of Switzerland" (29). Azorín, the Spanish novelist-essayist, adds: "El sentido de la Naturaleza es completamente moderno" (9:17). By and large, the claim is unexceptionable. Shakespeare, however, more than once reveals an appreciation for the world of mountains, e.g., "Thou shalt be as free as mountain winds" or "Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep" (both from *The Tempest*); see *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* for several others. John Dunn, more the creature of his own time, refers to mountains as "warts, and pock-holes in the face/Of th' earth" Nicolson 28.

<sup>5</sup> Any discussion of mountains and Romanticism should involve reference to the classic *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* by Marjorie Nicolson.

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of the seashell controversy, as old as Xenophon, 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., cf. "Geology Landscapes," http://www.lairweb.org.nz/Leonardo/landscape.html. Also see http://dml.cmnh.org/1995Oct/msg00508.html.

<sup>7</sup> If the reader will grant the truth of my claim that one of the most pervasive of all American popular-culture phenomena is our fascination with westerns (*European Culture in a Changing World*), I need to point out that most westerns, verbal or cinematic, are played out among mountains.

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## Carriers of Popular Indian Culture: The Bauls of Bengal

Manuscript History: This is a revised version of the paper presented at the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Far West Popular Culture and American Culture Associations (FWPCA & FWACA) in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Among the many diverse carriers of popular Indian culture over the centuries, the Bauls of Bengal occupy a unique position as devotees, mystics, naturalists, tantrics, and wanderers of India. Some of them are married and have children, but many are single and loners who travel from place to place singing songs of deep devotion and dancing in ecstasy. These simple and unassuming people from the lower rungs of Hinduism and Islam accept no social divisions, have no faith in sectarian religion, follow no orthodox religious practices, and accept no social barriers. Their lifestyle is simple and natural and they live joyfully in search of the *moner manush* or the "Man of My Heart" situated within the human heart.

The Bauls remained unknown to the outside world for a long time and were mentioned for the first time in *Bharat Barsiya Upasak Sampradaya* (Indian Devotional Tradition) in 1870. Subsequently the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore published twenty Baul songs of Lalan Fakir in his journal *Prabasi* in 1915–1916 and then commented on their religion in 1931 in his book *The Religion of Man.* K.M. Sen, an associate of Rabindranath Tagore at Shantiniketan, did some fieldwork on the Bauls and published an article about their life and beliefs in *Visvabharati Quarterly*, which was later included as an appendix in Tagore's *The Religion of Man.* The efforts of Tagore and Sen brought the Bauls into the limelight and made them a cultural symbol of India.

However, the Bauls even now remain more or less unrecognized and unappreciated in India and Bangladesh and available literature on them remains scanty. This paper highlights the life, philosophy, beliefs, and practices of the Bauls in light of their long-standing tradition, which over the centuries absorbed many influences of other religious traditions, yet remained unique. The paper also discusses the changes that are occurring in the Baul tradition under the influence of some urban and western change factors.

#### The Bauls

The word "Baul" is similar to bawala in Hindi and batula in Bengali. It is derived from vayu in Sanskrit, meaning one who is driven and affected by the wind and thus the common understanding that the Bauls are "free people" (free from the bindings and restrictions of organized society) and "madcaps" (madly devoted to the moner manush or the "Man of My Heart"). The following song

by Narahari illustrates this point and also hints at some of the religious beliefs of the Bauls:<sup>3</sup>

That is why, brother, I became a madcap Baul.

No master I obey, nor injunctions, canons, or custom.

Now no men-made distinctions have any hold on me,

And I revel only in the gladness of my own welling love.

In love there's no separation, but commingling always.

So I rejoice in song and dance with each and all.

The Bauls live in the state of West Bengal in India and Bangladesh and they come from marginal economic and social backgrounds. A majority of them belong to the lower strata of Hindu and Muslim societies and accordingly are looked down upon by the middle-class orthodox people in both religions. The Bauls, however, do not care and they live happily unfettered by the views and criticisms of the outside world. They are often seen singing and dancing in the streets in the company of an *ek-tara* (one-stringed drone instrument) and *dugi* (a small drum hanging from the shoulder). That is how they express their beliefs and practices, exhibit their devotion to the *moner manush*, and earn a living.

The lifestyle of the Bauls is uncommon and they recognize no caste, class, or other divisions. About caste Lalan Fakir said: "Does a man lose caste if he eats the rice a whore serves him, secretly?" To an outsider the Bauls appear to have various backgrounds and orientations, but within they are without distinctions and all their diversities merge as one stream. This fact has been recently substantiated by the fieldwork of Upendranath Bhattacharya, indicating that the ritualistic rites of the Bauls are similar in spite of the outward differences. The Bauls themselves say: "All the streams that fall into the Ganges, become the Ganges."

The Bauls do not worship any deity, visit no temples or mosques, and go to no pilgrimage places. Their attitude toward the deities, temples, mosques, and pilgrimage places is neutral, partly because of the restrictions placed on them by the middle-class orthodox members of the society and partly because they believe that the human body itself is the temple in which the Supreme resides and, accordingly, no outside places of worship are necessary for the spiritual pursuits. The saint-philosophers of India, like Kabir, Nanak, Ravidas, and Dadu, agreed with this viewpoint and considered man's body as the temple of God. Kabir said: "In this body is the Garden of Paradise; herein are comprised the seven seas and the myriad stars; here is the Creator manifest." The Bauls also say:

I would not go, my heart, to Mecca or Medina, For behold, I ever abide by the side of my Friend. Mad would I become, had I dwelt afar, not knowing Him. There's no worship in Mosque or Temple or special holy day. At every step I have Mecca and Kashi; sacred is every moment.

The Bauls, therefore, believe that truth is not found in religious books or scriptures as they simply obscure the spiritual effort and block the path to divinity. The devotee, they believe, has the scroll within which the scriptures are written in bold letters of life, although few care to read them and most turn a deaf ear to the message of the heart. The truth also is not in dry philosophy or verbiage:<sup>9</sup>

Oh, these word and words, my mind would none of them,
The Supreme Man it must and shall discover.
So long as Him I do not see, these mists slake not my thirst.
Mad am I; for the lack of that Man I madly run about;
For his sake the world I've left; for Bisha naught else will serve.

Nothing is greater than the person. He is the supreme and ultimate goal. Note, for example, the following:<sup>10</sup>

I have seen the vision, the vision of my own revealing itself, coming out from within me.

A universal all-pervading *avtar* (divine incarnation) may exist, but more important is the incarnation of the divine within each and every person and they say:<sup>11</sup>

As we look to every creature, we find each to be His *avatar*. What can you teach us His ways? In ever-new play He wondrously revels.

The Bauls live without inhibitions and they do not believe in austerities or penances for the spiritual pursuits. Also the good things in life are not to be given up, but are to be cultivated and used positively toward the spiritual pursuits. Worldly love is not to be sidestepped, but is essential for experiencing of heavenly love. Aloofness is not a requirement of pious life and communication with both God and his creatures is important. Liberation is possible only while one is alive and has a body. No afterlife exists and there is no hell or heaven. Freedom is to be sought not just from outside conventions and attractions, but also of inner desires and antipathies. Unless the bonds of necessity are overcome, liberation is out of the question. The goal of a Baul is of fana, or death, in relation to the outside world and living within guided by the light of devotion to the moner manush. There is only one religion for all, the "religion of man."

The Bauls want to live naturally and their day-to-day life is simple, spontaneous, and full of religious vigor. They wear long robes of rags with

patches and let their hair, beard, and moustaches grow. About wearing ochrecolored clothes they say: "Can color show outside, unless the inside is first tinctured? Can the fruit attain ripe sweetness by the painting of its skin?" The Bauls feel no worldly obligations and perform no *rites de passage*. They congregate in their own chosen places near about the holy days of Hindus and Muslims, but perform no worship. They mark the spots of their gurus and masters, but again no worship takes place.

The tradition of the guru remains strong among the Bauls and from him they learn their living philosophy, beliefs, and practices. The guru also helps them perform the needed tantric rites. The bond between the guru and the disciple, though, is loose and mutual expectations and obligations are not well defined. The Guru is not considered divine but is held in much esteem and all rites start with an invocation of the guru. Baul poetry, at times, refers to other phenomena as a guru is someone from whom one learns the lessons of life. Note, for example, the following:<sup>14</sup>

Would you make obeisance to your guru, O my heart? He is there at every step, on all sides of the path, For numberless are your gurus. To how many of them would you make your obeisance? The welcome offered to you is your guru, the agony inflicted on you is your guru. Every wrench at your heartstrings that makes the tears to flow is your guru.

The Bauls sometimes also refer to *shunya*, or Abstract Supreme, as guru, but the main focus remains on a human guru of all the gurus.

#### The Baul Tradition

Origins of the Baul tradition are unknown, as the sect has no written history and is not interested in creating one. The Bauls simply follow the *sahaj* (natural) way of life<sup>15</sup> and want to leave behind no trace of it. They say: "Do the boats that sail over the flooded river leave any mark? The true endeavor is to keep oneself simply afloat in the stream of devotion that flows through the lives of devotees." About the lives and works of other men before them, they say: "Are we dogs that we should lick up the leavings of others? Brave men rejoice in their own creation. Only the cowards are content with glorifying their forefathers because they do not know how to create for themselves." 17

One way to trace the history of the Bauls is through their songs. The songs, however, were passed on from guru to disciple through oral tradition whereby their language got updated and clues to the date of composition were lost. The oldest and most profound songs are of Lalan Fakir, by which the scholars place the origins of the sect between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. *Atharvaveda*, however, mentions the existence of sects similar to the Bauls (Nathas, Yogis, Siddhacharyas) during the Vedic period, and excavations

in the Indus Valley Civilization indicate the existence of similar sects even prior to that. It is, therefore, quite possible that sects similar to the Bauls have existed all along the history of the soil by different names.

Lokayata, Jain, and Buddhist traditions developed between 600 and 500 B.C. and Bhakti and Sufi movements spread all over India between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. These new religious traditions denied authority of the scriptures, ignored orthodox practices of Hinduism and Islam, and changed the meaning and content of religion. Religion became a common phenomenon and came within an easy grasp of the lower castes and marginal groups. Many sects similar to the Bauls emerged that emphasized direct communion with God within the human heart without interference from Brahmins and Mullahs. Those sects also emphasized that all mysteries of the world were located within the human body and needed to be identified and searched there. The leaders of the new sects were common people from lower rungs of the society who had attained self-realization and were closer to the Supreme.<sup>18</sup>

The above developments impacted the Bauls and yet they were able to retain their particular beliefs and practices. Today one sees in the Baul tradition glimpses of the earlier tantric, yogic, mystic, and bhakti practices as well as their own beliefs and practices. The following seven factors should be kept in view while understanding the Baul tradition today: 1) the existence of tantric, vogic, mystical, and bhakti practices prior and during the Vedic times and their permeation into all other religious traditions; 2) the emergence of Lokayata, Jain, and Buddhist philosophies and practices between 600 and 500 B.C. and their manifold interaction with the Vedic philosophy and practices; 3) the spread of Bhakti and Sufi movements throughout India between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries and changes that occurred in the meaning and content of religion; 4) the presence of potent folk culture in India throughout its history and its influence on mainstream religious traditions; 5) the loosening of some caste restrictions in the Middle Ages under the influence of Bhakti and Sufi movements, 6) the popularity of the "Mother Goddess" concept all over India, and 7) the urban and western influences on the Indian culture since the eighteenth century onward and developing new emphases on secularism, materialism, formal education, achievement orientation, urbanity, and other western beliefs and practices.

#### The Sadhana

The Bauls continue to have considerable flexibility in their beliefs and practices. Two major components of their sadhana (spiritual effort) are: 1) their emotionally charged devotional songs and dancing that they offer to the moner manush situated within the human heart, and 2) the tantric rites they practice to unite female and male universal forces within the human body (shakti and shiva) back to their primordial mode of motionless non-duality.

The devotional songs of the Bauls are sincere, sensitive, and melodious. A couple of examples are: 19

Ah, where am I to find Him, the Man of my Heart? Alas, since I lost Him, I wander in search of Him, Thro' lands near and far.

#### And:

The Simple Man was in the Paradise of my heart, Alas, how and when did I lose Him.

That now no peace I know, at home or abroad? By meditation and telling of beads, in worship and travail, The quest goes on for ever; But unless the Simple Man comes of Himself, Fruitless is it all; For he yields not forgetfulness of striving, Bisha's heart has understood right well, That by His own simple way alone is its door unlocked.

Tagore, as a boy, had heard a Baul song and he commented on it as follows: "What struck me in this simple song was a religious expression that was neither grossly concrete, full of crude details, nor metaphysical in its rarified transcendentalism, at the same time it was alive with emotional sincerity. It spoke of an intense yearning of the heart for the divine which is in Man and not in the temple, or scripture, or in images and symbols." <sup>20</sup>

The tantric practices of the Bauls are complex, elaborate, and they seek unity of the infinite and finite within the human body. Tagore said: "The Supreme is infinite in essence, but finite in his manifestation in all of us individually... Truth is, therefore, infinite and finite at the same time... God is God and man at the same time... The lover and the loved are one and the same." A Baul song also says: 22

Realize how finite and unbounded are One,

As you breathe in and out.

Of all ages, then, you will count the moments,

In every moment find the ages,

The drop in the ocean, the ocean in the drop.

If your endeavor be but sahaj, beyond argument and cognition,

You will taste the precious quintessence.

Blinded are you by over-much journeying from bourne to bourne,

O Gangaram, be simple! Then alone will vanish all your doubts.

The Bauls seek harmony between the past, present, and future (trikala-yoga) to assure continuity of life. Harmony is also sought between material and spiritual worlds, mundane and spiritual needs, and inward and outward existence. The body is gross and subtle and it is microcosmic in that all

mysteries of the world exist in it. It is also the abode of the infinite and finite, which are one and the same.

Woman has a high status among the Bauls as universal generative energy (shakti) and she is at the center of all mysteries of the universe. She is also an essential means for the liberation of the soul and victory over death. Tantric practices are defined in terms of male and female principles and each is present in men and women. The male principle is identified with semen located in the highest mystical chakra<sup>23</sup> (sahasrar) at the top of the head. The female principle is located in the lowest mystical chakra (muladhar) in the form of a sleeping coiled serpent (kundalini) and is manifested in the menstrual blood of a woman during her periods. Sexual intercourse is essential for the union of the male and female principles and the infinite and finite in the human body. Accordingly, sexual instincts are not to be despised or controlled, but sexual union along with breath control and yogic practices is the means for the awakening of kundalini and bringing cosmic unity of the female and male principles.

Tantric practices vary among the Bauls, but it is generally believed that the Infinite (shiva or sahaj manus) is situated in the sahasrar chakra and, during the menstrual period of a woman, feels an irresistible attraction to come down to the muladhar chakra in the Triveni, <sup>24</sup> meeting the earthly incarnation of shakti there in the menstrual blood. It is there that it can then be separated from the menstrual blood through the coital act, attracted to the male penis, and brought back to the sahasrar chakra of the male. The sexual union along with breath control and yogic practices awakens kundalini in the moladhar chakra, makes it ascend the next five chakras, pierce the last sahasrar chakra, and become united with the shiva or sahaj manus there. This is taken as the liberation of soul, and ecstasy in orgasm without semen ejaculation is indicative of a successful ceremony and of attaining the intended result.

In a typical tantric ceremony, the participating male and female are bathed and purified through mantras and *puja* (worship). The woman's body is anointed and massaged with sweet-smelling oils from head to foot, a red *bindu* (dot) is applied on her forehead as the third eye, and *kundalini* ascent is drawn in red from her genital area to the point of the bindu. She is wrapped in purple, violet, or red silk and is now taken as the representation of shakti herself. The rites begin, and step-by-step five main ritual materials (wine, meat, fish, parched rice, and sexual union) are applied seated on a kusha-grass platform which has an animal skin or wool cloth spread on it. A human skull, yantras (instruments), and mantras are also used during the rites. An oil lamp remains lit all the time. Ideally the male and female sadhakas (seekers) reach the point of orgasmic release without seminal ejaculation. The vital sexual fluids are then reabsorbed into the body and are considered necessary for existence of the Infinite and finite. The cremation and burial grounds are the sites for the rites, and undertaking the rites needs lot of courage, dedication, training, and self-control.

Supervision of the rites by a qualified guru is also imperative. The sadhakas additionally need freedom from negative emotions, like lust, anger greed, infatuation, vanity, and envy. Unbridled lust (kama) is the worst enemy.

### The Changes

The Bauls have maintained their lifestyle, beliefs, and practices for a long time, but are now feeling the pressure of some urban and western change forces (secularism, materialism, formal education, achievement orientation, urbanity, etc.) to which they have been gradually adjusting. Also, since coming into the limelight, they have lost their earlier ignorance of the outside world and have been drawn increasingly into psycho-social interaction with the rest of society. People have been noticing their lifestyle, values, and practices (particularly the sexual tantric practices) and scrutinizing and passing comments on them. The Bauls are aware of these developments and have been making changes to fend off the criticism and brighten up their image. Lately, more emphasis is being placed on the bhakti component of the tradition, although the tantric component also remains strong. The tantric component of the tradition is showing signs of bifurcation. The vamacharas have kept the original tantric practices in place, but the dakshincharas have modified the practices somewhat and have, for example, substituted coconut or milk for wine; salt, ginger, sesame, wheat, or garlic for meat; eggplant, radish, or water chestnut for fish; rice or wheat for parched rice; and an offering of flowers, joining of flowers, or gesturing of the hands for sexual union. Vamacharas prefer performing the tantric rites during the menstrual period of a woman, the dakshincharas prefer certain days of the dark fortnight after the woman's menstrual period. One also notices more householders among the Bauls who have a preference for a stable lifestyle, but most Bauls continue to be loners and wanderers. The adjustments in their lifestyle, beliefs, and practices do not constitute major transformations, as they continue to conform to the old tradition and not much change can be seen at first sight.

#### **Bearings on Popular Culture**

The Bauls remain unique and through their natural, simple, and spontaneous life have demonstrated the strength and resiliency of popular Indian culture in the presence of internal and external pressures for change. To the people around them, they have revealed the possibility of a free and unrestricted life, away from the expectations and bindings of organized society. Caste, class, and other divisions do not matter to them and they believe in the oneness of people without formal distinctions. They have served as a role model to the lower strata of the Hindu and Muslim populations as to how to live confidently on an equal footing with the rest of society. In spiritual life they have demonstrated that rituals, observances, and false piety are unnecessary in spiritual pursuits and visits to temples, mosques, and pilgrimage places do not matter. The human body is the temple and abode of the Divine and one should

live inwardly guided by devotion to God. For this, one does not need scriptures, religious books, dry philosophy, or verbiages as examples of the elevated ones are sufficient to guide one to the path of divinity.

Nothing is greater than the person and no austerities or penances are needed in spiritual pursuits. Good things in life are not to be given up, but cultivated positively toward the spiritual goals. Worldly love is necessary for experiencing heavenly love, and sexual instincts are not to be despised or controlled. Aloofness is not a sign of a pious life and communication with God and His creatures is necessary. Liberation is possible only when one is alive and has a body and there is no afterlife, hell, or heaven. Freedom is to be sought not just from outside attractions, but also from inner desires and antipathies. Unless the bonds of necessity are overcome, liberation is not possible. Day-to-day life has to be natural, spontaneous, simple, and full of vigor. Harmony has to be sought between the past, present, and future to assure continuity of life. Harmony also has to be sought between worldly and spiritual pursuits, mundane and religious needs, and inward and outward existence. The tradition of the guru is important and one can learn even from the leaves, trees, wind, fire, rivers, and mountains. Sadhana is the sole basis of living and results in a carefree and happy life. Both persistence and change are necessary for the continuity of life and popular culture.

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#### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath, *The Religion of Man.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1931. For more on Baul songs and their philosophy, See Bhattacharya, Deben, *Songs of the Bards of Bengal.* New York: Grove Press, 1969; Datta, Rajeshwari, "The Religious Aspects of the Baul Songs of Bengal." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 37, 1978, pp. 445–455; Capwell, Charles, "The Esoteric Belief of the Bauls of Bengal." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 33, 1974, pp. 255–263; McDaniel, June, *The Madness of Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- <sup>2</sup> The article was entitled "The Baul Singers of Bengal." See Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, op. cit., 1931, pp. 209-221.
- <sup>3</sup> Sen, K. M., *Hinduism: The World's Oldest Faith.* Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1961, p. 103.
- <sup>4</sup> Lopez, Donald, *Religions of India in Practice*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 192.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 188.
- <sup>6</sup> Sen, Hinduism. op. cit., 1961, p. 105.
- <sup>7</sup> Sen, K. M., "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, p. 211.
- <sup>8</sup> Sen, Hinduism. op. cit., 1961, p. 105.
- <sup>9</sup> Sen, "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, p. 216.
- <sup>10</sup> Tagore, The Religion of Man, op. cit., 1931, p. 117.
- <sup>11</sup> Sen, "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, p. 216, p. 217.
- <sup>12</sup> See Reymond, Lizelle, *To Live Within*. New York: Doubleday and Co, 1971.
- <sup>13</sup> Sen, "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, p. 216–217.

- <sup>14</sup> Sen, Hinduism...op. cit., 1961, p. 106.
- <sup>15</sup> See Sharma, Satish, "The *Sahaj* Philosophy of the Bauls of Bengal." A paper presented at the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Western Social Science Association Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2005.
- <sup>16</sup> Sen, "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, pp. 213–214.
- <sup>17</sup> Sen, Hinduism. op. cit., 1961, p. 105.
- <sup>18</sup> For more information, See Sharma, Satish, "Development of the Indian Religious Tradition and Popular Culture," *Asian Profile*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2004, pp 255–266; Sharma, Satish, "Bhakti Tradition and the Role of Saint-Philosophers in Popular Indian Culture." *Popular Culture Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2004, pp. 91–102; Sharma, Satish, "The Bhakti Movement in India: A Short Essay." *Popular Culture Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1999, pp. 111–122.
- <sup>19</sup> Sen, "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, pp. 216 and 221.
- <sup>20</sup> Tagore, The Religion of Man, op. cit., 1931, p. 110.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 113-114.
- <sup>22</sup> Sen, K. M., "The Baul Singers of Bengal," op. cit., 1931, p. 220.
- <sup>23</sup> The mystical chakras are visualized along the spinal column as lotuses with varying numbers of petals. Seven chakras are generally enumerated, but the number varies from one yogic tradition to another. The seven chakras are: 1) the *muladhar* at the base of the spinal column with four petals; 2) the *svadhisthan* in the region of the genitals with six petals; 3) the *manipur* at the level of the navel with ten petals; 4) the *anahata* at the level of the heart with twelve petals, 5) the *vishudda* in the region of the throat with sixteen petals; 6) the *ajna* between the eyebrows with two petals; and 7) the *sahasrar* at the top of the head with a thousand petals. Muslims refer to these chakras by way of *mokams* (stations or stages) and there is considerable similarity.

Mystical naris (veins) are also important in Sadhana. The three most important naris are ira, pingala, and sushumu. Ira is to the left of the spinal column, pingala is to the right, and sushumu is in the middle. The place where the three naris meet is Triveni. See Radhakrishnan, S. and C. A. Moore, A Source Book of Indian Philosophy. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957; Lopez, Religions of India in Practice, op. cit., 1995; White, David, Tantra in Practice. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> See note 23.

# Narrative Transformations: Jonathan Lethem's *Men and Cartoons*Comic Books and Geek Culture

For example, there was a sense that you belonged. There was the certainty that there were always others who had compassion for you, even when things were at their hardest.

-Rick Moody, The Diviners, 437

In *Men of Tomorrow*, Gerald Jones posits that roots for the term "geek" can be traced to the transformation of youth culture in the late 20s and early 30s, and that the name comes from a form of "super fandom" that comic strips and the early comic books engendered: a community of boys (and a few girls) who grew up in a changing world where old values and assumptions no longer dominated their belief systems. These kids grew up the products of the modern middle class and were "the first generation to grown up with access to an alternative universe provided by commercial entertainment"; they grew up "understanding that the very nature of experience and perception could be transformed by machines and artifice, rendering the 'make-believe' as palpable and dignified as the 'real'"; they grew up at a time where "movies, pulps, radio, the phonograph, comic strips—all combined to give the new generation an inexhaustible supply of emotional and imaginative experience that required no participation in reality" (35–36).

This community, circulating around others who encouraged "keeping one's core in that other world even when school or work demanded the presence of one's outer self," allowed young people who shared similar backgrounds, life stories, anxieties, or fears, to join together and to create subcultures within this main culture. These subcultures "fine-tuned" their identities—"an indifference to clothes and appearance, a manic but unsentimental bonhomie in their meetings, an amused distain for those who didn't understand them. There was no word for it yet," stated Jones, "but now we can see this as the birth of geek culture—comic, computers, video games, collectible figurines—has either grown directly or taken much of its forms" (37).

The stories and adventures captured in comic books spoke to hundreds of thousands of kids who bought and discarded them as quickly as they read them. Comics are a readable, tradable, disposable art form that had been created for easy consumption and profit by the magazine publishing companies in the 30 and 40s.<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey O'Brien argues that comics can be "absorbed without effort"; in effect, a comic book is a "book capable of reading itself.... A comic offered instant gratification of a longing for quick answers, passwords, shortcuts. It dismantled the narrative that the kids didn't want—the narrative that was

cumbersome, obstructive, an imposing duty, a deferral of pleasure—in order to get at what every laborious framework seemed to conceal within itself, the story that had already arrived at the place [the reader] wanted to be" (123).

The kids who collected the books, who organized and re-organized them according to creation date, principle artist or writer, or by genre (superhero yarn, romance, western, and so on), who belonged to fan clubs, who wrote long letters speculating on areas and ideas the comics themselves never touched, and who created a universe, gave their heroes a reality that displaced the reality of their own lives. Most of these fans lived in obscurity; others were drawn to the source of their fixation and became artists and writers themselves. Much as a young boy might have grown up wishing to play baseball in Yankee Stadium, these young men (and women) wanted to work in the same buildings, walk the same halls as their forefathers: Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, Steve Dikto, and others who created the strips and the comics and the art they loved. Other fans found other routes.

Sean Howe argues that modern writers have brought comics into "literary circles" and claims that hidden in much modern literature is the "once furtive formative obsessions." that many writers had had with the comic books of their youth (xi). Besides Lethems's *The Fortress of Solitude*—which, Howe argues, contains "passages [that] miraculously telegraph the very experience of reading a comic"—he also cites Rick Moody's *The Ice Storm* (where "protagonist Paul Hood uses an old issue of *Fantastic Four* as a metaphor for domestic breakdown") and Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (which "lovingly chronicles two comic book creators") as obvious examples of writers who have merged comics and modern literature (XI). In each of these novels, Howe argues, comic book knowledge and comic book culture is "filtered through the guise of fiction" (xi). For the reader, the reverberations of comic books within the prose narrative creates a reflective moment, a moment imbued with a sensation of nostalgia—or, at least, a sense of being in on the joke. 5

In these novels the comic book hero or story or tale is not the center of the work; rather, they are peripheral to the story. The very idea of the comic book—the universe created in it, its heroes and villains—and those doing the creating become fused with the story. Perhaps as metaphor, perhaps as symbol, perhaps as representative of some other space of meaning; comic book culture is appropriated by literature to serve some other purpose besides being the narrative. Think about it, even Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* has less to do with the fantasy narrative of "The Escapist"—Kavalier & Clay's comic book creation—than it does with the narrative centered on literary realism of two creative young men coming of age at a particular time and in particular place. Chris Ware argues for the primacy of comic books suggesting that "the possible vocabulary of comics is, by definition, unlimited, [because of] the tactility of an experience told in pictures," and that "comics are an art of pure

composition, carefully constructed like music... brought to life and 'performed' by the reader"; however, the work in discussion here is not graphic novels but prose fiction (11).<sup>8</sup> And this is what Lethem presents us with in *Men and Cartoons*—where the two "superhero" stories that I want to focus on reflect the kinds of reader Lethem was.

Lethem's collection, Men and Cartoons, is an example of realism amplified by the styles and genres of other prose narratives. Stories like "Access Fantasy" and "Vivian Relf" are informed by utopian and dystopian narratives; vet they remain centered on the human element—that is, the utopian or dystopian world found in these stories stands out not because they are reflective of a particular philosophical take or a central motif, rather they stand out because they represent the order of things as they are. The narrative places the reader into these worlds as actual: the action of each of the stories assumes that this is the world as is. On top of this, both of these stories are love stories circulating within the boundaries of speculative fiction. In "Vivian Relf" the characters reduplicate a relationship that may or may not have existed. In "Access Fantasy" people escape through the barrier—from their cars to Apartments—and into the world beset with Advertising—capital "A." To stay, they must don a patch that compels them to become walking commercials announcing of all sorts of commodities. And in "The Spray"—an example of science fiction layered onto a detective story—we are led to question the very veracity and commitment of the two principle characters. The idea of "The Spray" is simple: a light misting of a spray allows the user to "see what" he or she "is missing." Used by the police to help identify items after a burglary, they accidentally leave the spray behind after investigating a case. The couple, whose apartment was burgled, decides to use it as a lark, spaying one another with a light mist. What is missing is revealed: the commitment either partner has for the other and the secret lovers who cling naked to them.

The superheroes stories—"The Vision" and "Super Goat Man"—are good examples of how prose fiction takes the genre of super-human comics and transforms it from its predominately graphic form into a textual one: the combination of text with pictures or simply pictures themselves is erased. Instead of graphic icons "representing" the thoughts of the artist and writer in a fluidity of style(s), we have abstract icons—words—"representing" the thoughts and ideas of the writer. In either case, though, it is the pull of the idea—its attraction to us—that keeps us reading.

"The Vision" draws its inspiration from the world (or is it "universe"?) created by Marvel Comics beginning in the 1960s—comics which at first competed with and later surpassed their in-town rivals DC Comics. One of the reasons they did so, Lethem tells us, was because "anyone who read [Marvel Comics] understood weren't comic at all, but deadly serious" works (Leonard 31). The character, "The Vision," made his appearance in issue number 57 of *The Avengers*. He was an android created to battle the Avengers, later he joined

them, and later still he had "a romantic relationship with the hex-casting heroine called the Scarlet Witch that blossomed into true love and marriage" (Marveldirectory.com). 11

In Lethem's "The Vision," both "The Vision" and "The Scarlet Witch" reappear, but not in the way imagined by their comic-book writers and artists. This story does not take place in a world populated by superheroes, rather, it takes place in the here and now—the ordinary, not the extra-ordinary. "The Vision," simply put, is an example of a realist narrative; it is a memory piece the actual event or "moment of the story" that the narrator, Joel Porush, describes to us is the evening of one day. And yet the story itself is expansive. We are provided with background information that helps us make some sense of the situation. Porush describes a chance meeting with a childhood friend of his. Adam Cressner, who had moved back to the old neighborhood. Their moment of re-acquaintance is awkward: Cressner refuses to acknowledge that they are from the same neighborhood or that they had gone to school together: "Possibly I remember vou," he says after Joel strikes up a conversation. His demeanor seems as odd to the narrator as it does to the reader; however, like the narrator we have the upper-hand: earlier in the story our narrator has told us about Adam's school-boy identity. As a kid, Cressner was taken by the comic character The Vision and emulated him by smearing his face "with red food dye" and wearing an imperfect replica of his superhero costume. He even talked like the Vision: "Ultron-5 constructed me well"—spoken, our narrator recalls "in the mournful monotone of a synthetic humanoid" (2).

Now grown up, Cressner is a professor of art history at Columbia and he and his "paramour," Roberta Jar, invite Joel into their home one evening to join in a party they are hosting. The invitation is an after thought as they need one more person to make fifteen—the number of players needed to play "Mafia." He accepts. The party is a low key affair and the game runs its course with Joel being removed from the "village" early on. Not wishing to mingle with the other guests, he finds himself in the library looking through the two collections of Marvel history—Origins of Marvel Comics and Son of the Origins of Marvel Comics—that had been published in the early seventies. A young woman named Doe, who he is attracted to, joins him and he has a short but flirtatious conversation with her. It leads nowhere, but then it shouldn't since her character serves simply to provide Joel a reason to expose Adam's childhood obsession.

As the party draws to a conclusion, Adam suggests that since the night is still early, those who can stay should. And Joel offers up another party game they all can play: "I Never." It is a drinking game and the idea is to make a true statement "beginning with the words *I never*" (14). Anyone who has done what has just been described must "confess" by taking a drink. As with all drinking games, the object is to get the "worldly" to drink too much, embarrass themselves and reveal secrets (14). And this indeed, is what happens. But as

with all drinking games, innocent questions do not seem so innocent the more one drinks, and feelings have a way of being hurt. In a bid to uphold a perceived slight on Doe made by Adam, Joel offers this: "I've never pretended I was a character from a comic book" (18). But instead of Adam copping to the charge by drinking from his beer, Roberta "turns [his] hostile joke into [a] confession and she tells about meeting a man who she felt deeply connected to but there was a secret priority in his life" that made their life difficult. That priority had to do with this person dressing as a superhero. So she did her research and found out that this character in question married another superhero and that filled her with hope. To become part of his world, she designed her own costume modeled on the Scarlet Witch. The confession closes the evening and the party breaks up and everyone heads out into the night alone—except, of course, Adam and Roberta, who stand united, connected in a deeper understanding.

In a sense the story ends where it began—though this time The Vision is not alone on the playground in his face paint and costume, but at home where he belongs with his paramour, the Scarlet Witch. This is the hook and the reversal of the story: the promise of coupledom—a promise that has escaped our narrator, Joel. Indeed, early in the story Joel tells us that his girlfriend has left him and doing so, she seems to have taken his ability to enter into a grownup world as well. The undercurrent of bitterness that runs through this reminisce must find root here. For it is "the tyranny of the Vision and the Scarlet Witch," as Joel recalls, that had "all been a little much for us poor singles" (21).

If The Vision drew inspiration from Marvel Comics in order to exploit the connection between people and their imaginations, "Super Goat Man" is symbolic of a postmodern glossing of the real with the fantastic—that is, the two are a logic of one: reality is the fantastic and the fantastic is reality. In Lethem's story, Super Goat Man exists as both an ontological reality and as a fiction, specifically a comic book superhero. That is how he is understood. It is not the case that some strange force has allowed him to wrest himself out of the pages of a comic book into the world at large, rather he already lives in the world at large. This fact is simply taken for granted.

Like "The Vision," "Super Goat Man" is a memory piece. This story is in three sections, with each section advancing the narrative about ten years into the future. The story opens with Super Goat Man moving into the commune on Cobble Hill, Brooklyn where 13 year old Everett lives with his parents. Super Goat Man does not have an alternate or secret identity. Sometime after they shot Kennedy," he tells Everett, "I just realized Ralph Gersten wasn't who I was" (125). As a neighbor, Super Goat Man resonates more with the fathers than with the kids and that is probably because he is part of their comic book reading past. Everett muses that for the fathers perhaps Super Goat Man represented some lost possibility in their own lives" (120). For the kids on the block, though, he is "only another of the men who sat on the stoops in sleeveless undershirts on hot summer days," and even the "two fleshy little horns on his

forehead didn't make him especially interesting." "We had eyes only for Spider-Man or Batman in those days, superheroes in two dimensions, with lunch boxes and television shows and theme songs." Everett tells us (119–120). The phrase "superheroes in two dimensions" suggests that even in this "hyper-reality" where a superhero might move into the neighborhood, there is still a distinction made between those superheroes who exist in both worlds and those superheroes who—lacking in range or depth—do not.

Everett tells us that Super Goat Man's comic had a "five-issue run" and then it was "forever canceled" making him a "minor star" (120–121). Even his publisher, Electric Comics, "wasn't one of the major comic publishers" and the stories themselves "were both ludicrous and boring": "Super Goat Man's five issues showed him rescuing old ladies from swerving trucks and kittens from lightning-struck trees, and battling dull villains like Vest Man and False Dave" (121). In the end, Everett finds the comics to be "embarrassing for myself, for Super Goat Man, and for my dad" and dismisses them out of hand, as he does Super Goat Man (121).

Umberto Eco wrote that "Real heroes are always impelled by circumstances; they never choose, because if they could, they would choose not to be heroes" (122). And this seems to be the maxim that the story seeks to work through in the second part when Super Goat Man is called to act and does so with tragic consequences: The year is 1981. Everett is a junior at Corcoran College in New Hampshire and Super Goat Man has joined the teaching staff in order to "fill the Walt Whitman Chair in the Humanities" (127). Toward the end of Spring Term two frat boys climb up Campanile Tower on campus and begin bellowing: "Baaahh, baaahh, Super Goat Man! ... What's the matter with your goaty senses? Smoke too much dope tonight?" and so on (134). Obviously a superhero associated more with saving kittens and little old ladies than with super-valorous deeds may not be the kind of superhero needed in this situation. Still, clad only in a silk kimono-which, hanging loose, might make a passable cape—he shakes the cobwebs from his head and treks toward the Commons and the Tower. Armed with giant sculptures of paperclips, the two boys wait. Of course tragedy is also waiting and as one of the boys tries to balance on the roof, he slips and plummets to the ground, shattering his lower body. Super Goat Man, who had been climbing up to rescue him, had reached out in an attempt to catch him, but came away only with the model paperclip. The boy survives fall, but is paralyzed and spends the last year at the university as a kind of sad figure. That he is alive, however, prevents any sort of mythologizing about the incident. "Instead," Everett informs us, "it was covered in clumsy hush" (136).

In the third part of the narrative, we learn that Everett finished his studies and went on to graduate school and pretty much forgot about Super Goat Man. After receiving his Ph.D. from the University of California at Irvine, he takes a two-year post-doc at Oregon State University and there he meets Angela and marries her. She has studied at Oxford and is in America on a scholarship.

Oregon State, as it turns out, is the third university she has attended—previously staying for one year at Columbia and for one term at Corcoran, Everett's old stomping grounds. After they marry, Everett finds himself on the job market and with very few offers beyond the campus visit and he is intrigued by an offer to interview at Corcoran.

At the campus visit Everett is told that an aged Super Goat Man is still on campus, still teaching a course or two, and that he will join them at the faculty dinner. Everett also finds out that when Angela was a student at Corcoran she dated and had a brief affair with Super Goat Man. "We fooled around a few times. It was stupid," she tells him (142). Everett responds "I don't know why but I find that totally disgusting" (142). But Everett does know why. For Everett, Super Goat Man is the embodiment of the Other-more specifically, he represents the sexual threat of the Other. Not only is he part man, part goat—with its dionysian associations—more importantly, he is a superhero (albeit, a minor superhero) and therefore he is the actual of every kid's fantasy. With the full attention of everyone at the faculty dinner, he leans towards Super Goat Man and in a voice louder than necessary tells him, "I once saw you rescue a paperclip" (147). And in uttering that sentence, he recasts a memory best left forgotten and effectively emasculates Super Goat Man, the college, and his own candidacy for a position at Corcoran University and the story ends.

Arguing that his "so-called originality—which is just as often called [his] 'surrealism' or [his] 'postmodernism'—is overstated at the expense of how deeply traditional his work is," Jonathan Lethem claims that "any innovation is a sort of howling red flag. . . . It's in the nature of the innovations to demand disproportionate attention and description" (Birnbaum). And though Lethem is speaking about the reception his novel *The Fortress of Solitude* 15 received—how in his mind it was mis-perceived as avant-garde rather than the collaboration between traditional realism and postmodernism he saw it to be—innovation is the hallmark of his work and of his recent collection of stories *Men and Cartoons*. 16 These nine stories appropriate the spirit of comic book culture, while at the same time they expand and transform the genre in order to reinterpret it and resituate it within the boundary of prose fiction. These stories transform the ordinary into the "amazing" and the common place into the "incredible" as did their science fiction precursors—and, as did and still does, comic book culture. 17

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> (a) It is surprising the music isn't part of this list since in the past 40 plus years youth culture has divided itself along the lines of styles or genre of music—everything from Goth to Punk to Alternative to Heavy-Metal to Hip Hop and on and on—each has its own look and ethos and codes that help like-minded fans find each other as it also helps

Madison Avenue partition out the demographics that directs their products to these divergent groups. (b) The American Heritage Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, has these two entries for the word "geek": (n) slang. (1) An odd or ridiculous person; (2) A carnival performer whose show consists of bizarre acts, such as biting the head off a live chicken. The AHD cites the Low German gek—"fool" as (perhaps) the root word.

<sup>2</sup> As an art form, comics have had their shares of ups and downs: the booming years of the 40s the threat of extinction in the 50s and the rebirth of the superhero in the 60s (exemplified by the Marvel brand of hero: the superpowers are not part of the character's birthright; rather, the hero has somehow accidentally been transformed through some sort of genetic mutation).

In his discussion with Robert Birnbaum, Lethem claims that *The Fortress of Solitude*, rather than being "a break with what proceeded it, ... is the opposite. *Fortress* is the culmination of what I have being doing to that point. It recapitulates almost every interest and every concern of the early books, and utilizes all the tools I'd accumulated, all the methods and motifs I had been exploring and gathering." Indeed, he adds, "Precisely because I've now discharged a lot of my original material by exploring it in this immense fiction—I'm not bloody likely to need to transpose childhood trauma into Marvel comics again—for perhaps the rest of my life."

<sup>4</sup> To those titles he could have added Chabon's own 1995 novel, *The Wonder Boys*, which makes an off-hand and sly reference to Marvel's iconoclastic (and in a sense, seminal) comic, *The Fantastic Four* in such a way that allows the novel reader (who may have come of age reading comics) a moment of gentle self reflection.

<sup>5</sup> In *The Wonder Boys*, for example, Chabon's protagonist, Grady Tripp, drives up to "The Baxter Building" to pick up his third wife, Emily. She works in the building as a "copywriter for an advertising agency.... Richards, Reed and Associates" (27). Through the agency of Tripp's narration we learn that Susan and Ben are two of her friends, and they also work at Richards, Reed and Associates. On this stormy day, though, Emily does not emerge from the building and Tripp is forced to admit that she has "walked out on their marriage" (28) and the novel and the narrative moves on from there.

It is a quiet reference—there are no bells and whistles—and one that is made and then passes from the narrative without incident or examination. But for all of those who were fans of *The Fantastic Four* after their appearance in 1963 would recognize Chabon's coincidental "play" of names; for they ring a bell. Reed Richards (Mr. Fantastic), Susan Storm (the Invisible Girl), and Ben Grimm (The Thing) were three of the four members of the most incredible fighting team of all time. Only Sue's younger brother, Johnny Storm (The Torch) is missing.

There are novels that have a superhero as the central character—for example, De Haven has just published a remarkable novel titled *It's Superman* which retells the Superman legend in a new and innovative way. In De Haven's novel Superman, per se, is a peripheral character. The novel's focus is on Clark who, growing up in the 1930s, is shaped by the Depression and the social injustice he sees and experiences. Such a reading amplifies and forces us to critique the meaning of a phrase as "Truth, Justice, and the American Way."

<sup>7</sup> Of course, Michael Chabon's character's fictional creation—The Escapist—has in time taken on a life of its own. On the Captain Comics web site we can find this note:

In the meantime, we have this unusual comic book. The conceit of the series, like the novel, is that The Escapist really has been published since the '40s, and that Kavalier and Clay were real people. As Chabon writes in a Dark Horse press release: "When I first began my research into the careers of Joe Kavalier and Sam Clay, their classic creations—the Escapist, Luna Moth and the rest—had lapsed into near-total obscurity. I'm delighted and very grateful that Dark Horse has decided to breathe new life into these grand old characters." I'm willing to pretend that The Escapist has existed for 60 years, if you are. And I'm looking forward to this series, after which The Escapist really will have existed in comics. If "Adventures of The Escapist" is a hit, in a few years it won't matter that his first 60 years of stories are only imaginary. In a sense, aren't they all?— December 7. 2003. (http://www.captaincomics.us/columns/ wc12072003.htm)

<sup>8</sup> I do not want to imply that Graphic novels do not have a literary quality—they do. Here is what *Wikipedia* says about the art form: The term "graphic novel" was popularized by Will Eisner after it appeared on the cover of the trade paperback edition (though not on the hardcover edition) of *A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories* in 1978. This collection of short stories was a mature, complex work focusing on the lives of ordinary people in the real world, and the term "graphic novel" was intended to distinguish it from traditional comic books with which it shared a storytelling medium. This established both a new book-publishing term and a category distinct from paperback (from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic\_novel).

For more on this idea of representation using words or graphics as abstract ideas, see Scott McCloud's "The Vocabulary of Comics" in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art.* 24–37.

<sup>10</sup> Unlike, perhaps, DC Comics, which at times had treated their flagship comics— Superman and Batman—as formulaic and as routine as the next; and, indeed, at this time these comics could feature stories and "villains" that were downright goofy. Christopher Sorrentino argues that:

Marvel transformed the medium in the sixties, starting with the elemental visual impact of Jack Kirby's drawing, which challenged the primacy of the paunchy heroes DC presented in their series of tiny, static tableaux (Jules Feiffer once dryly observed that ever since it had left Joe Shuster's hands, *Superman* looked like it had been "drawn in a bank"). The scripts, building on the steady, accretive development of a vast narrative cosmos, were soon cross-resonating throughout the Marvel realm, so that to fully comprehend the action in a given issue of, say, *Thor*, you had to first read the prior month's issue of *The Avengers*. Consequent reader confusion was dealt with dismissively; an offhand footnote might stipulate, "If you've forgotten ish #45, you'll have to take our word for it! . . . Snide Stan." (DC, on the other hand, found continuity to be a bugaboo—or maybe it just didn't care: Were Superman's adoptive parents named John

and Mary Kent? Eben and Sarah? Jonathan and Martha?) And the characters, if not the Sophoclean creations [Stan] Lee suggested they were, were not interchangeable hero-drone units inhabiting the DC universe, either (59).

Il Given the soap-opera nature of comics, i.e., without conflict there can be no story; the idea of living "happily-ever-after" is a misnomer. In subsequent issues of *The Avengers*, The Vision's "control crystal" malfunctions and he "became bent on creating a new golden age of peace on Earth by seizing control of the world's computers and defense systems. Ultimately, the Vision reverted to form by severing his connection to the planet's databanks and extracting the control crystal from his mechanized mind. In the wake of the android Avengers' meltdown, the nations of Earth came to regard him as a high-level security threat. Government operatives abducted and dismantled the Vision, erasing his memory. The Scarlet Witch and the Avengers recovered their teammates' components, and Pym rebuilt and reprogrammed the Vision. The scientist downloaded the sum total of the Avengers' computer files into the synthezoid's neural processors, but Wonder Man refused to allow a new record of his brain patterns to be synthesized. Apparently, he had grown resentful of his digital doppelganger and was attracted to the Scarlet Witch himself. Hence, the Vision returned to existence sans human emotion, unable even to recall his love for his wife" (Marveldirectory.com).

Origins of Marvel Comics was published in 1974 and Son of Origins of Marvel Comics the following year in 1975. Both of these volumes served to "reproduce and burnish the creation myths of the great sixties characters" (Lethem, "The Return of the King").

In the "Neighborhood Profile" section of New York Magazine on the Internet, Cobble Hill is described in this way: "The Basics: Slightly cheaper than Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill is home to quiet streets lined with quaint brownstones as well as Court Street's happening restaurants and bars. Boundaries: Stretches from Atlantic Avenue to Douglass Street and from Columbia to Smith Streets. Borders: Brooklyn Heights and Carroll Gardens" (http://www.newyorkmetro.com/realestate/articles/neighborhoods/cobblehill.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this is a nod to Lee and Kirby's *The Fantastic Four*. When asked why he doesn't have a secret identity, Super Goat Man answers, "I wasn't that kind of superhero" (125). Perhaps as a parody of the Superman story, when asked if his parents were "sad when you gave up your secret identity," Super Goat Man smiles and answers, "They weren't my real parents. I was adopted" (125).

Before the Fantastic Four, all superheroes had "secret identities." The assumption behind this trope was that the hero needed to shield the identity of his (and later her) "other" self in order to protect the lives of loved ones. That is, if Superman, for example, let it be known that his "other self" was Clark Kent, he would put his parents and friends and associates in harm's way since they could be targeted to get to him. But though the members of the Fantastic Four—Reed Richards, Sue Storm, Johnny Storm, and Ben Grim—take on the superhero "name-tag" (Reed is "Mr. Fantastic;" Sue, "The Invisible Girl;" her brother, Johnny, is "The Human Torch;" and Ben is simply, "The Thing") they do so not conceal their identities; rather, these names offer the reader (and the writer) a kind of short hand. Interestingly, the characters use their birth names and heroic names interchangeably. For example, in any story line, one might "hear" Reed yell out: "Johnny,

use your powers to blast a hole in that wall" just as often as he might have yelled, "Torch, use your powers to, blast a hole in that wall," and so on.

Another nod: as the story begins, Super Goat Man moves to and lives in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, an actual place, not some fictitious city. It is not Metropolis or Gotham City or Smallville—cities and towns that changed shape, texture, size, architecture depending on the demands of the story or, more often, the whims of the artist. Again, this was Marvel's genius. Though the first issue of *The Fantastic Four* locates them in "Central City," New York City will be their home (*Origins of Marvel Comics*, 22). And to a young boy living on the other side of the country, it was real and fantastic, otherworldly and solid. Like the neo-realists who place their characters in real settings, incorporating the actual with the fantastic, blending and fusing the two so that there is a blur of reality—the is and the is not as one—Marvel dared to suggest that heroes were part of our ordinary life, who, besides possessing incredible powers, had to deal with the same pressures of daily life that we all did. However, with one big difference: unlike us, while trying to come up with the money for rent or to pay off a credit card, they also had to contend with a super villain or two.

"Fortress of Solitude" as a symbol is so much associated with Superman. It was a singular, secret place chiseled out of the rock and ice—a hideout in the Artic where Superman could "escape the petty anxieties of life as Clark Kent [and] study life on other worlds or explore records of his Kryptonian past" (Jones 286). It was added to the Superman lore in the late 50s along with a host of other ideas that would "turn Superman's predictable little world into a circus of surprises" (286): an ugly "other" named Bizarro, new forms of Kryptonite that affected him in different ways, a teenage cousin named Supergirl. And Kandor, a city shrunk into a bottle, where "Kryptonians live their lives and yearn for the day Superman can restore them to their normal size" (286–287).

Lethem's character's Fortress is Brooklyn and the world of comic books and his own mind.

<sup>16</sup> Part of the misperception rests, of course, with the way Lethem commingles a narrative frame of a traditional sort with a wholly untraditional counterpart. That is, *The Fortress of Solitude* is a "coming-of-age" novel in the guise of a *Bildungsroman* that is haunted by postmodern assumptions and techniques. In the novel, Lethem's protagonist Dylan Ebdus forces us to see, hear, smell, and taste what it meant for him to grow-up motherless and (essentially) fatherless in Brooklyn. New York, in the early 1970s. He tells his story as remembrance and glosses it with healthy doses of the real and imagined world of comic books and comic book culture. The "real and imagined world of comics," for Dylan Ebdus, does not signify a separation, a schism between fact and fiction; rather, there is the element of magic realism at play here: in telling his story, reality transforms into hyper-reality, transcending the moment in order to bring clarity to the moment of the story. Comic books, for Ebdus, provide an emotional center—codified in the arch of traditional realism, while at the same time providing an alternative identity and an alternative way of seeing things. And isn't alternative reality the signaling focusing of the hyper-real?

"When I was twelve," recounts Ebdus about the magic ring that had come into his possession.

and the ring first came into my hand I believed that flying was the denominator, the bottom line of superheroic being: any superhero

flew, even if they had to cheat by vaulting or floating on bubbles of conjured forces or riding in a hovercraft. So it was a flying ring. By the time I wore it again on that Berkeley hill I knew differently. Invisibility was what every superhero *really* had in common. After all, you'd ever seen one?

It is, of course, a rhetorical question since Ebdus and his friend Mingus Rule have both donned the costume of Aeroman-their own secret superhero-and "battled" crime (with varying degrees of success and failure). And it is Ebdus's use of invisibility that allows him to help his friend and right a terrible wrong. Or is it? Perhaps it is the power of narrative to override reality and present an alternative ending in the place of the actual. <sup>17</sup> Maryel Comics was no different. Timely Inc., which was the publishing company, had been publishing comic books filled with monster stories and science fiction tales (as well as westerns and romance stories). Distribution for Timely's line was through DC Comics. who only allowed Timely eight titles per month. Stan Lee tells us that the germ for the comic The Fantastic Four, comes from two parallel drives: a desire to compete for the superhero dollar (especially after the success of DC's The Justice League of America series did so well), and to create a superhero comic "such as comicdom had never know" (Lee, Origins of Marvel Comics 17). And part of the mythology that Stan created was that he purposefully wanted to create characters who did not have secrete identities or wore superhero costumes—and indeed in the first few editions of Fantastic Four the heroes "dressed like real people" (17). But as Greg Theakston argues in Tales to Astonish by Ronin Ro, the lack of a costumed hero may have been a result of Marvel wanting to keep "their superhero line looking as much like their horror line. . . . Hence, you get the Fantastic Four in the first two issues without costumes" (87). And even when they did put the Fantastic Four into costumes, the cover also featured "yet another slightly misleading monster" (87). The point is that it was more a matter of practicality than "artistic expression" that brought about these changes in the normal superhero story or plot. That is not to say that Stan Lee and Marvel did not exploit these differences as much as they could (allowing them to become bigger than DC). The Fantastic Four, however, was an entity unto itself and didn't really match up with the idea of DC's Justice League where various superheroes joined together to become greater than their individual parts. To rectify this, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby created The Avengers. Oh, what a group: Thor, Iron-Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp and the Hulk brought together by accident (and because The Fantastic Four were "wrapped up in another case" [Son of Origins 92]), they decide to team up and become one of, to use Stan Lee's words: "The Greatest Super-hero teams of All Time" (Son of 107). Interestingly, the Hulk seems pretty sentient here, remarking: "I'm sick of bein' hunted and hounded. I'd rather be with you that against you. So whether you like it or not I'm joining the...the...Hey! What are you calling yourselves?" (107). Upon reading this, I am reminded of the line in Lethem's The Fortress of Solitude, where he writes: "The Incredible Hulk, if you followed him closely over time, lost the use of pronouns" (65).

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### The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia

Edited by Philip C. Kolin Greenwood Press, 2004

In *The Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia* Philip C. Kolin, editor of the volume and *Popular Culture Review* contributor, has created a work that is not only of great scholarly value to the Williams researcher, but also of interest to anyone, either professional or lay, seeking information about Williams, his influences and counterinfluences, and his milieu.

While the volume does not lay claim to being comprehensive—Williams' contributions and influence are far too vast for that—it provides 150 detailed entries "essential to understanding Williams' life and work." The *Encyclopedia* is designed "to help readers understand the context and performance of a Williams work and the contours of his life into which it fits" through "four types of entries: on individuals, on places, on works, and on concepts."

For example, Annette J. Saddick's entry on Yukio Mishima and his complex relationship to Williams explains how the two influenced each other both artistically and personally until Mishima's suicide. In the Truman Capote entry, Susan Swortwout describes a relationship gone wrong as the two move from hijinks to jealousy and litigation. In the entry on St. Louis, Allean Hale provides the rather surprising information that this "Southern" author placed more than thirty of his works in that city, perhaps not too surprising when one realizes that he spent more time in that city than anywhere else. Naturally, the works themselves make up the largest category of entries, "including all the genres in which Williams wrote—plays, full-length and one-acts, stories, poems, essays, memoirs, journals, even paintings."

Finally, the conceptual entries weave the strands of information together to provide a comprehensive overview of Williams' work. These entries include, among others, "Mythology," "Race," and "Gender and Sexuality." Mark Edward Clark concludes the "Mythology" entry saying, "Because Williams' plays are saturated with diverse myths, he might be seen as a modern American mythographer who drew upon the typologies of the classical tradition to shape his characters and, to a lesser degree, his plots," further noting that PBS had titled its 1994 documentary about the author "Tennessee Williams: Orpheus of the American Stage." In one of the most extended entries, "Gender and Sexuality," John M. Clun argues that it is impossible to grasp Tennessee Williams' work unless one understands how his homosexuality informed it.

Easy to use, the *Encyclopedia* prefaces the entries with an *Alphabetical List of Entries* beginning with Edward Albee and ending with *You Touched Me!* and then moves to an extensive "Guide to Related Topics," followed by a "Chronology."

Philip Kolin's *Tennessee Williams Encyclopedia* is a masterpiece of its kind, lucidly organized, beautifully written, and so interesting that one is hard pressed to put it down as one entry leads to another.

Felicia F. Campbell, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

## The Vampire as Numinous Experience: Spiritual Journeys with the Undead in British and American Literature

Beth E. McDonald McFarland & Company, 2004

Vampires have long held an influential spot in American popular culture, affecting everything from movies (various originals and remakes) to music (the goth sound and scene) to literature ("serious" literature and romance). In response, critics have long wondered what it is about vampires that entrances. However, in spite of the fascination, vampires have always been problematic: somehow at once highly seductive yet emblematic of evil.

We just may have an answer in Beth McDonald's *The Vampire as Numinous Experience* as she manages to confront this issue in a wholly convincing way. Her thesis? Combining psychological and religious literary theories to interpret various works, she tells us that while vampires are a negative symbol, they hold within them elements of the sacred, able to give humans a numinous, transforming experience. It is emphasized that it is the movement from the known, rational world to the unknown and irrational and back again that is important to the experience: "It should be noted that a symbolic border (where the seeker/traveler crosses over from the known to the unknown) is an important symbol in virtually *all* journey tales" (93). Another component of the process is that "an experience of the numinous eventually must be perceived as real by the character [in a text] and the reader in order that the anxiety and fear felt through the dynamics of power and powerlessness be at their greatest strength to lead the subject to a change . . . " (25).

The author uses three different texts from three different time periods to illustrate her thesis, moving from the metaphorical ("The Rime of the Mariner," chapter two) to the iconic (Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, chapter three), ending with the realistic, contemporary vamps of Anne Rice's world (*Vampire Chronicles*, chapter four).

The author does an able job with the first text. Unfortunately, calling "The Rime of the Mariner" a "vampire tale" is achieved only through tenuous linguistic maneuvering as some scholars have made the vampire connection in

the past, but some of their conclusions have been drawn from very thin evidence indeed, which the author then uses to extend her own conclusions. However, to her credit, she does acknowledge the tenuousness of the links, and the first two chapters are most useful in laying down the psychological, religious, and linguistics tools necessary for interpretation, effectively creating the link between the profane world of vampires to that of the sacred and showing that they have the potential for numinousness. McDonald really hits her stride when she moves into the meatier texts of *Dracula* and the *Vampire Chronicles*. It is in chapters three and four that the reader comes to understand that vampires are useful figures in times of transition or a "new millennium" of human thought.

Overall, this is an important work since no other author (or at least none found by various searches performed by this reviewer) has associated the negative symbolism of vampires with a positive, transforming experience. There are many theories as to why something so evil is so seductive, but nobody has said this is a good thing.

If a complaint could be made, it would be that although this treatise admittedly is a reworked dissertation, it could have gone further in studying the copious amounts of contemporary vampiric tales (especially in romance and science fiction) and relating how the possibility of a numinous, transforming experience is available to everybody, regardless of genre or literary inclination.

Reika Lee, Independent Scholar

# Jacking in to the *Matrix* Franchise: Cultural Reception and Interpretation

Edited by Matthew Kapell and William G. Doty Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004

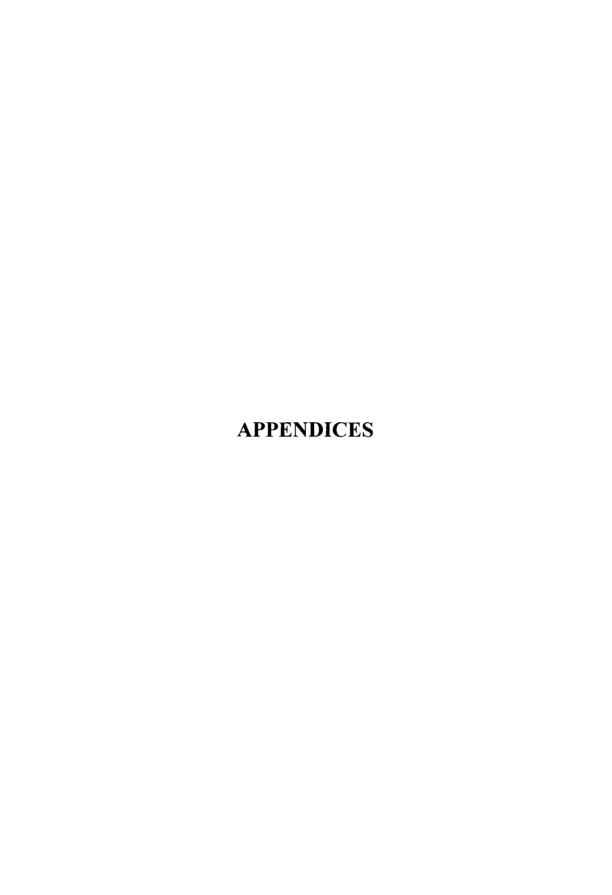
Jacking in to the Matrix Franchise provides an accessible look into the incredible phenomenon that is the Matrix series. Drawing as it does from many aspects of popular culture (music, religion, gaming, computers, technology, and violence, to name a few), all of the movies and games are open to a wide variety of interpretations. It is the editors' intent that this work will provide "enrichments to the first [film]—and the second and third, and all the franchise elements in between and beyond . . . [including] a computer/video game, Enter, and the DVD, Animatrix . . . [and] the series, Comics" (1). In light of the popularity of the source material, the editors also wanted to create a work that could be accessible to nonscholars and gave an editorial mandate to the authors: "make it clear, eliminate technical scholarly debates, and express yourselves the way 'ordinary people' talk" (2).

Some articles were more successful than others in adhering to this mandate. In particular, Richard R. Jones is to be commended for the accessibility of his article "Religion, Community, and Revitalization: Why Cinematic Myth Resonates." It is the high drama of the hero that grabs us because ordinary people aren't interesting. We are used to intense drama in contemporary "reality shows," but that intensity is only achieved through a highly structured environment; to the viewer's eyes, the people on these shows are revealed to be anything but ordinary. Movies and the moviegoing experience also work as highly effective cultural disseminators: "When a moviegoer enters a theater, he or she enters a highly structured environment to view a highly stylized and generalized depiction of human interaction for the two hours or so that the theater patron sits in front of the silver screen, she shares a common experience with millions of other people—especially if it is a very successful movie" (59). A successful (or spectacularly unsuccessful) movie then generates a veritable forest of cultural connections: discussions with friends, reviews are written, it is seen on the news, and it becomes part of trivia games and contests.

The article submitted by John Shelton Lawrence ("Fascist Redemption or Democratic Hope?") also does an admirable job of presenting a highly technical thesis without excessive scholarly jargon. Certainly, Heidegger's philosophy is not an easy topic to interpret even for scholars. The premise is initially startling: "the Matrix narratives strike me as celebrating a mythology with anti-democratic implications; its narratives are sketched with a chiaroscuro of elements that thrilled the millions who cheered early twentieth-century fascisms" (81); yet it all makes sense in light of the authorial discussions about the American monomyth, rites of initiation, heroism, and providential leadership. It is impossible to do the article justice in a short review; you must read it for yourself.

These are but two out of a total of eleven essays about various aspects of the *Matrix* franchise, covering nearly every cultural topic one could think of—gender, race, religion, violence, politics, technology, and philosophy (i.e.: free will, choice, and why does "reality" matter)—not to mention the usual "isms": feminism, racism, and postmodernism. Some articles even combine several of these topics into one discussion. Although the topic choices are numerous, and the potential for chaos is high, there is not one weak link in the entire book.

Mindy Hutchings, Independent Scholar



#### Appendix A

#### Risk as Pleasure Corrected Text

Anything becomes a pleasure if you do it too often.

-Oscar Wilde

Entertain: to provide amusement for (a person or audience), to show hospitality to (guests), to give pleasure, diversion (C15: from Old French entré-tenir—to mutually hold)

-Collins English Dictionary.

I feel I should examine the principle premise on which gaming activities are based and to tend to the ethical and epistemological, at least in fundament. Evidence of the pursuit of risk-taking goes back to the early Lower Pleistocene man who understood that a trap for animals would yield a different outcome depending on placement. The odds of against his getting a meal would be smaller if he left less to chance<sup>1</sup>. Clearly such deliberation on maneuver-over-outcome is a process we almost always assume in even simple decisions. In gaming and as play such deliberation is isolated from its usual working world associations. Risk, play, and leisure are interestingly connected in the game environment.

Leisure serves as an important component of human productivity.

No society can exist on production alone. It must devise principles to organize time and space—it must develop and maintain a healthy environment for its citizens to continue to foster economic and cultural growth, educate its young, make provisions for the sick, elderly and the disadvantaged and for the workers to relax and play. A surplus of energy and resources always remains. The problem of leisure is how to use this surplus<sup>2</sup>.

Rojek (p. 1, 2) mentions the traditional societies such as the Azande, where the occult and the religious are bound to coordinate the tribe's surplus energy dominated by the individual's observance of witchdoctors and oracles. The mystical forces at work in the lives of the tribe determine the individual's 'general life-course—the Azande's notion of time is that there is overlap between the present and the future. Unlike the characteristic Western concept, time is not linear—space is not defined according to a rational-legal criteria. Shamanism seeks to reconnect the powers of the medicine man to reconnect earth with the highest heavens. The 'epic journey' away from the mundane world, allows the shaman to bring back knowledge of the future after travel to the superhuman world of the gods.

Leisure and travel (Rojek p. 2) is a legacy of the epic journey or pilgrimage. Mundane life is demanding in its highs and lows and unrelentless in its burden to the worker. We are so bound by the workplace requirement that we are often 'prey to feelings of inauthenticity.'

Conventionally defined as an activity that acts as complementary to the vocational endeavor. As Rojen puts it, leisure lets us 'get in touch with ourselves' and makes 'status statements about ourselves to others... placing us culturally in relation to others.' As we move toward a post-work society, the ethical framework to deal with this transition has yet to be fully explored and accepted by our culture. 'The main challenge facing students of leisure is to devise ethical principles of private well-being and public responsibility which are compatible with post-work society.'

If leisure is a way of spending 'useful' time as a 'surplus' away from work, we also now need to examine the role of play, which at a fundamental level, is seen to provide a diversion from the occupational routine, a deviation or respite from the continuum of the work treadmill. We seek to engage in leisure-time play pursuits to refresh our vigour. It gives the player a way to detach from daily transactionary intimidations, the hazards of vocational proceedings and decision-making, a respite from the exchanges and dealings in our hectic working lives. In its many forms, we play games that exploit our otherwise under-utilised physical selves—aerobics, competition sports, chess and other board games, bush exploration, water adventures, car rallies, a game of cards.

We choose these activities for their ability to distance us from the mechanical aspects of work. This distancing may provide the individual alternate perspectives of life and life- strategies by the active sharing of leisure interests with other individuals.

An activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity and material utility. The playmood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action<sup>5</sup>.

Play is a 'free' activity outside 'serious' ordinary life, 'outside the sphere of necessity and material utility. The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action.'6

There are also significant purposes for play quite apart from its therapeutic and recreational functions. Play is necessary for development. Ideas are playful reverberations of the mind. Language is the playing of words until they can impersonate physical objects and abstract ideas. Play is an open-ended willingness to explore the unknown.

Animals play when they are young as rehearsals for their later adult functions: '... it invites problem-solving, allowing a creature to test its limits and develop strategies; survival belongs to the agile not the idle.'

In human education, one of the most effective style of learning is that of discovery—the linking of information with its possible applications. Experiments in the science labs, making art in its exploratory moves has its essence in play.

Colour delineates play in mental space, purposeful and exploitative; in nature, colour is used as trickery: designed by perpetrators to communicate important life-and-death information, to deceive, attract and to signify danger. Ackermann reports that 'Dr. M. Kasperbauer of the USDA Coastal Plains Research Centre discovered that plants react to far-red, a colour beyond human vision, as if threatened by a rival, spiraling high and boosting the production of chlorophyll and protein in their leaves . . . Femme-fatale lightning bugs decode the semaphore of their rivals in order to lure and steal other females' mates.' 8

The choice of colour in casinos and in game design and furnishing has been subject to psychological and intuitive interpretation. Tradition is categorical: green and red is always used, blue is incidental. The Chinese superstition extends equally to colour as in numbers and symbols. In the new casino parlours in Macau, Feng Shui is prerequisite in the logistic to make players feel at ease.

In Feng Shui (wind water), and according to Chinese philosophy, one's success is determined by five areas of influence9:

Yiming: Destiny

Eryun: lucky and lucky eras San Feng Shui: art of placement

Shi Daode: virtue

Wu Dushu: background, culture, education, experience,

exposure

The first two are not within the control of any individual, therefore the other three should be understood and developed to optimum levels. Feng Shui is recognized in the western world now by other than the advocates of superstition. Astrological elements are strategized by complementing conditions and settings to temper and harmonize impulsive spirits and desires. Energizers and enhancements in the environment are instrumental to comfort and poise.

Play is bounded by freely accepted rules and is conducted in an orderly manner, promoting 'social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their differences from the common world by disguise or other means.' Caillois goes further by describing play as 'spectacular and ostentatious . . . play exposes, publishes and expends and . . . it removes the very nature of the mysterious . . . and that the secret, the mask or the costume fulfills

a sacramental function one can be sure, not play, but an institution is involved.<sup>11</sup>

Caillois also notes that missing from Huizinga's definition of play are games of chance played for money and that a distinction need be made where the definition of play affirms or implies the absence of economic interest.

Caillois classifies play into 4 types:

Agon: contest of skill (chess, football, golf)

Alea: games of fate/ chance and requiring luck to win (cards,

roulette, dice)

Mime: adopting a different identity (charade)

Ilinx: contains the pursuit of vertigo or loss of consciousness

(dancing, acrobatics, psychotropic drugs)

	type	mess	limits
AGON	cultural forms found at the margins of the social order	institutional forms integrated into social life	corruption
competition	sports	economic competition competitive examinations	violence will to power trickery
A L E A chance	lotteries casinos hippodromes pari-mutuels	speculation on stock market	superstition astrology feng shui
MIMICRY simulation	carnival theatre cinema hero-worship	uniforms ceremonial etiquette	alienation split personality
ILINX vertigo	mountain climb skiing tightrope walk speed	professions requiring control of vertigo	alcoholism drugs

Figure 1

#### Caillois: Schema for Play

The diagram above (Figure 1) adapts Caillos' synthesis to show the application and limits of each grouping of play. The extrapolative diagram proposes that play may degenerate into self-indulgence or else transforms into a new facet of exploration.

Ackerman differentiates between simple play and deep play (deep: The most intense or extreme part; profoundly absorbed and immersed<sup>12</sup>). Deep play is a state of transcendence, which alters our notion of time, space, and spirit—brings out our 'best-selves'—a state of unselfconscious engagement with our environment<sup>13</sup>.

Ackermann also links play with risk. Risk drives us forward, challenges our sense of the logical, the status quo. The act of risk-taking is empowering and enabling, and gives us pleasure.

#### Risk-as-Necessity

Risk is defined as the potential loss or harm arising from an intended action.

We may be either risk averse or loss averse. Kahneman<sup>14</sup> speaks of a 'delusionary optimism' in association with loss aversion: 'people are generally timid and dislike risk; they are more prudent than they think they are, they think too small.' 'Bounded rationality' is the norm in our decision-making, especially during periods of uncertainty. Most of the time we don't know that we're taking risks<sup>15</sup>. Fate is going to be kind to us is the self-perception in gauging our own well-being. Kahneman cites the fundamental example of the 2 to 2.5 odds gamble, and demonstrates that the level of willingness to participate is predictable by proportion. In the community, players take the highest risk and property owners the lowest.

#### Games People Play: Game Theory and its broad context

Game Theory is a mathematical theory dealing with game-like situations in which participants wish to maximize some property (such as utility) in positions of uncertainty, not only with respect to the state of nature but also the actions of other players whose interests may be opposed or parallel to those of the participant. Typically, when deciding what to do, one must predict the actions of others with the knowledge that they themselves when deciding which action to perform will predict the actions of others including oneself. Complexity may be increased by allowing coalitions between players.

Game theory has been used to analyze and calculate best possible strategies in game-like situations such as business, war, politics, and social activities. It has been extensively developed in the 20th century by John Von Neumann (1903–57) and Oskar Morgenstern (1902–).

There is a relationship to decision theory, viz.:

Decision theory<sup>16</sup>: A theory whose subject matter is the situations in which a decision problem arises; a situation in

which one may be typically faced with a set of alternative actions and uncertainty as to the consequences of all or some of these actions. The problem is in deciding which action to undertake, that is, which action is most rational relative to the information available.

One common approach is to assign probabilities to the occurrence of the consequences of each action, estimate utilities (welfare, happiness, etc.) associated with each consequence, and to select as most rational the action with the maximum expected utility. However, in many situations inadequate information may make it impossible to assign probabilities or estimate utilities with certainty or near certainty. The approach also takes no account of risk aversion.

In response, weaker principles have been adopted, such as the minimax (maximin) principle which recommends choice of the action which has, as its worst outcome, a consequence which is better than the worst consequence of any alternative action. The principle is often criticized as being too conservative except in a small class of situations (zero sum games in which one's opponents are rational).

One of the main problems facing decision theory is that there is no adequately accepted notion of what is involved in rational decision. Attempts have been made to develop axioms (assumptions) which any intuitive concept of rationality must satisfy. It seems that suggested decision criteria do not satisfy all such axioms.

The 'rationality of randomness': the notion that numerical chance and probability has structure outside its mathematical bounds, often associated with intuition, rhythm, and cycles also noticed in biological contexts including fractal theory.

#### Risk as an Epicurean Pleasure

As deemed by the principles of Epicurus ('philosopher of the garden' 341–270 BC) ataraxia is the experience of soul-satisfying emotional bliss, and is the moral goal of his philosophy. According to Epicurus, no activity experienced is indefinitely pleasurable, otherwise one might be inspired to dedicate every waking hour to one single task<sup>17</sup> (Anderson, 1991). Indeed, as Epicurus states in his eighth principal doctrine:

If every pleasure could be intensified so that it lasted and influenced the whole organism or the most essential parts of our nature, pleasures would never differ from one another.

Anderson posits six fundamental avenues of pleasure, which following Epicurean principles, optimizes the viability of the human species through a rotation or 'full' spectrum of experience. Ataraxia is thus accomplished through

an equilibrium of pleasures. To mitigate the daily grind, humanity had simultaneously devised numerous diversions that we collectively regard as recreational outlets: vacations, the arts, hobbies, sports, clubs, parties, dating, dining, dancing, and many other facets of leisure. We find these pastimes intrinsically pleasurable because they incorporate essential attributes of prehistoric lifestyles. Having fun is how we pay homage our evolutionary heritage (Anderson). He proposes a conceptual matrix, which remedies and retrieves the missing 'genetic' conditioning lost since industrial 'specialisation' and the multiplying of divisions of labour.

The Anderson matrix grids Epicurus' leisure experiences in a hierarchical order, much like Maslow's hierarchy of need or Bloom's taxonomy. Emotional satisfaction is perhaps optimized through a rotation of vital activities at the depth and breadth most appropriate for the human ecological niche: e.g., eating, bonding, mating, exploring, hunting, learning, contemplating, innovating. The lateral partition differentiates the external versus internal realms of experience; the three columns characterize differing intensities of volitional effort.

The resulting categories—sensation, adventure, mission, imagination, communication, and speculation—Anderson regards as representing the six fundamental routes to pleasures which invigorate the human soul. The Anderson diagram (Figure 2) represents the grid of pleasures according to Epicurean principles.

#### Anderson's Epicurean Matrix

	spontaneous	interactive	proactive
	sensation	adventure	mission
presentation	immediate gratification. gournet food, sex, art, music, garden	exploring unknown: new horizons, games risk	hunting, homehunting, all games, sport, travel, novelwriting, making art
	imagination	communication	speculation
representation	fantasy, dream, film, art, music	shared experience, conversation, the news symbolic language lover's kiss	investment, gambling, astrology, [feng shui ?]

Figure 2

Below are Anderson's explanations for the tabled elements<sup>18</sup>; I present these definitions unchanged.

Presentation:

Spontaneous presentations: the sensuous pleasures are derived from any sensory experience that we find to be gratifying in and by itself. Of these pleasures, quenching our sexual and stomachical appetites are paramount on the list of human preoccupations.

Interactive presentations: the adventurous pleasures are the experiences of sheer enjoyment we receive from exploring the unknown: revelation, novelties.

Proactive presentations: the mission-oriented pleasures are evoked by the thrill of the chase. Among the most ancient human missions was surely the hunt. There is accomplishment in the attainment of some objective, such as in a game where there is a well-defined goal.

#### Representation:

Spontaneous representations: the imaginary pleasures emanate from the realm of fantasy. The theatre of the imagination plays a pivotal role in the human psyche.

Interactive representations: the communicative pleasures are derived from all facets of shared experience. Through the symbolic means of language, be it written, spoken, or signed: brainstorming, gossiping, and other freestyle forms of conversation, the Confession. Communication can also be carried out through touch and action. The lover's kiss and caress are often more than just sensual delights, but also explicit expressions of affection.

Proactive representations: the speculative pleasures emerge from predictions about the future. The keen ability of the human mind to model reality naturally entices us to contemplate what-if scenarios as a prelude to decision making. The institutions of investing and gambling allow us to place stakes on how precisely the outcomes of real events conform to our expectations. Winning many kinds of games in general often depends upon how good we are at outguessing our opponents. Speculation also facilitates the advancement of knowledge, since by doing so we lay the initial groundwork for discovery. There also exists a great human fascination with prognostication even when the methods employed are known to be dubious (such as astrology and other forms of fortune telling).

The grid of pleasures shows that the level of challenge increases proportionally in the presence of the uncertain and the speculative. Heightened pleasure is synonymous with the thrill of the unknown, with the risky. Such activities as sky diving, gambling on high stakes, or high-speed racing give the participant a rush. Big fun from big play! Balance is the key, rather than intensity. Happiness is maximized by a regimen of pleasurable activities.

This analogy hints at the reason why the pursuit of happiness so often goes awry for so many people. It is because they plunge into their favored routines with counterproductive voracity, so that sensations become obsessions, adventures become misadventures, missions become crusades, imagination becomes escapism, communication becomes clamor, and speculation becomes rumination. Spiritual equilibrium is overlooked in favor of living on the edge, and what results is emotional burnout rather than emotional fulfillment. The Anderson analysis offers much to help explain the social ills that come from any form of excessive or obsessive pursuit, including addictive involvement of risk-taking as a pleasure.

#### Dealing with Risk

Risk, distinct from threat is mostly seen to be the 'potential future harm' or loss that may arise from some present event, the result of a *speculative* action. From experience and observation, the opposite of this is the act of choosing not to pursue that action, which may also be (equally) subject to risk

Often combined or confused with the probability of an event, there are many variations on how risk is measured. Holton differentiates between objective and subjective probability, but ultimately proposes that probability does not exist<sup>20</sup>... and that 'risk management has become an operational cornerstone in contemporary financial and organizational analysis. In such analyses, the challenge has been for economists to be able to distinguish between measurable and unmeasurable uncertainty.'<sup>21</sup>

Usually the probability and some assessment of expected harms must be combined into a believable scenario combining risk, regret, and reward probabilities into expected value. However, there are many informal methods which are used to assess risk<sup>22</sup>; it is impossible for agencies to be able to gather and analyse (measure) risk than an 'infinitesimal fraction of all the evidence abut the infinitude of risks that exist in the world.'<sup>23</sup>

In automobile design, the probability of a severe impact to the roof of the vehicle is much smaller than one that may occur from the front (which has the greatest probability), the rear, or sides. It's not questioned by safety conscious consumers who buy cars with ten airbags, that the roof would offer no protection if the car was to overturn or suffer heavy impacts there; the car is perceived to be safe in a high probability of cases.

In scenario analysis, each future event or risk is measured against other possible alternative outcomes. Risk in this scenario differs from threat. Threat

refers to a very low-probability but high-impact event, which cannot typically be assigned a probability in a risk assessment because it has never occurred, and for which no effective preventive measure is available. The difference is most clearly illustrated by the precautionary principle which seeks to reduce threat by requiring it to be reduced to a set of well-defined risks before an action, project, innovation or experiment is allowed to proceed<sup>24</sup>.

Interestingly, risk is defined in its commercial applications by Stephen Rapaport: A profession by definition is in a conflict of interest with respect to the risk passed on to its clients.<sup>25</sup> Professional expertise may often be defined by the way risk is measured or assessed. For example, in health, the expertise of medical practitioners, food technologists, and pharmaceutical copywriters is measured by their ability to assess risk and by their ability to give 'safe' advice. A professional code of ethics is usually focused on risk assessment and mitigation (by the professional on behalf of client, public, society, or life in general)<sup>26</sup>.

In 'Risk,' Adams observes that 'The relentless pursuit of risk reduction has made safety an enormous industry.'<sup>27</sup> He distinguishes between perceived and measured risk, contending that the 'risk thermostat' is guided by cultural constructions. The 'thermostat' is thus affected by myths about nature and human nature (behaviour)<sup>28</sup>, and demonstrates that calculations against risk as highly subjective and complex.

Australia China Council, Beijing

Laurens Tan

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Notes
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Rojek, C.: 'The Culture of Leisure,' p. 2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Huizinga, Johan: Homo Ludens

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ackerman, Dianne: Deep Play, p. 4

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p. 180

<sup>9</sup> Rossbach, S.: Feng Shui, The Art of Placement, Arkana, NY 1983

<sup>10</sup> Caillois

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Webster Dictionary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ackerman, Dianne: Deep Play, p. 162

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Dr. Daniel Kahneman: *The Psychology of Risk*, U of Sydney: RC Chambers Research memorial lecture, Thursday July 3, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> A very specific version of behavioral finance, prospect theory, was first advanced by Amos Tversky and Kahneman in 1979.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Bothamley, J. (1993) Dictionary of Theories, p. 138

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Anderson, on Epicurus in Wikipedia (Encyclopedia online) 7/7/03

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Anderson, on Epicurus in Wikipedia (Encyclopedia online) 7/7/03

<sup>19</sup> Wikipedia.org on "Risk"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Holton, Glyn A. (2004) "Defining Risk," *Financial Analysts Journal*, 60 (6), p. 20
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<sup>22</sup> Wikipedia.org on "Risk"
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<sup>24</sup> Answers.com on "Risk"
<sup>25</sup> It.: 4

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Armand Singer, former Chair, Humanities Program, West Virginia University, has published many articles (*The European Legacy*, *Popular Culture Review*, *PMLA*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, etc.), four bibliographies on the Don Juan theme, a volume on Paul Borget, five books and two monographs on Tibetan and Nepalese philately, and two collections of his own limericks. Editor: *The WVU Philological Papers* (1952–2004); Co-editor, 2005–.

Laurens Tan has just been awarded his doctorate at the University of Technology Sydney. Risk as Pleasure is one of the initial chapters in his thesis The Architecture of Risk and the title of his current series of installations and sculptures. His work considers time and chance as he continues his investigations in entertainment design. He was a finalist for the 2005 Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award and the 2005 McClelland National Contemporary Sculpture Survey & Award, both in Melbourne, Australia. Laurens was the 2005 winner of the 43rd Fishers Ghost Award at the new Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia. Laurens will conduct new research in architectural sculpture as the Australia China Council artist-in-residence in Beijing (June–August 2006).

Jan Whitt is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Author of numerous articles in popular culture, media studies, literary journalism, and American literature, Whitt is completing a book about the history of women in journalism. Her book *Allegory and the Modern Southern Novel* was published by Mercer University Press in 1993.

## Popular Culture Review

Popular Culture Review, the refereed journal of the Far West Popular and American Culture Associations (sponsored by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas) is published twice yearly. It is indexed in the MLA Bibliography and the Modern Humanities Research Association's Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature. Members of the FWPCA/FWACA receive each issue as part of membership. Single copies may be purchased for \$10.00 domestic and \$15.00 international. Yearly subscriptions for institutions and libraries are \$25.00. Requests for back issues should be submitted to the editor.

Please note that the journal is now all electronic and all requests for submission guidelines and/or submissions should be sent to Felicia Campbell (Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas) at fcampbell@ccmail.nevada.edu. Documentation may take the form appropriate for the discipline of the writer; the current MLA style sheet is a useful model. The editorial staff will defer to the current Chicago Manual of Style to resolve stylistic differences.

The journal invites articles on all aspects of both popular and American culture. Correspondence about membership in FWPCA/FWACA, which includes a subscription to *Popular Culture Review*, should be sent to Felicia Campbell at felicia.campbell@unlv.edu.

Popular Culture Review gratefully acknowledges the contributions made to this journal by the UNLV College of Liberal Arts and the UNLV Department of English.

Articles published do not necessarily represent the opinions of and are not the legal responsibility of *Popular Culture Review*.

ISSN 1060-8125

## Studies in Popular Culture

Studies in Popular Culture, the journal of the Popular Culture Association in the South and the American Culture Association in the South, publishes articles on popular culture and American culture however mediated: through film, literature, radio, television, music, graphics, print, practices, conditions of life. Its contributors from the United States, Canada, France, Israel, and Australia include distinguished anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers, ethnomusicologists, historians, and scholars in mass communications, philosophy, literature, and religion.

Please direct editorial queries to the editor: Dennis Hall, University of Louisville, Department of English, Louisville, KY 40292. Telephone: (502) 588-6896/0509. Fax: (502)588-5055. Bitnet: DRHALL01@ULKYVM. Internet: drhall01@ulkyvm.louisville.edu.

All manuscripts should be sent to the editor care of the University of Louisville, Department of English, Louisville, KY 40292. Please enclose two double-spaced copies and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Black and white illustrations may accompany the text. Our preference is for essays that total, with notes and bibliography, no more than twenty pages. Documentation may take the form appropriate for the discipline of the writer; the current MLA style sheet is a useful model. Please indicate if the work is available on computer disk. The editor reserves the right to make stylistic changes on accepted manuscripts.

## Call For Papers

Far West Popular Culture and American Culture Associations Nineteenth Annual Meeting: JANUARY 26-28, 2007 Las Vegas, Nevada Sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

We cordially invite you to our Nineteenth Annual Meeting. Papers on all aspects of Popular Culture worldwide and American Culture as well as readings by creative writers are welcome. Those interested in submitting proposals for either papers or readings or creating either conference sessions or Sunday round table discussions for either FWPCA OR FWACA should send abstracts of less than 100 words and titles by November 22, 2006 to:

Felicia Florine Campbell
Department of English
University of Nevada, Las Vegas 89154-5011
702-895-3457 e-mail: felicia.campbell@unlv.edu
FAX 702-895-4801

The registration fee of \$135.00 includes a light buffet at the opening reception, morning coffee and rolls, lunch on Saturday, a subscription to *Popular Culture Review* (our refereed journal), plus additional conference events to be announced. Student registration of \$50.00 includes all events scheduled on the program and one issue of PCR.

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